PREFACE

Our discussion is pertaining to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)[1]. In this context, there are approximately twenty topics. For each of these discussions, there is an appropriate method of presentation, evaluation and analysis, bearing finer aspects of knowledge. To approach these topics from any other way would be inaccurate and erroneous.
These topics are in the following order:

1) The future of mankind in heavenly and non-heavenly religions. In other words, what is the future of the world in the opinion of various schools of thoughts? Is humanity heading towards decline or to perfection? Is this perfection voluntary or involuntary?
2) If this future is positive, in what conditions will it occur? What are the characteristics of this future and the pre-requisites for its leadership?
3) How is the future of humanity in the Islamic view?
4) What kind of prophesies are found in Islam (Quran and traditions) concerning the future of mankind? To know the Islamic opinion, there is no other way but to refer to the Holy Quran. Hence, if somebody proves his stance regarding the future through the Holy Quran, he cannot be asked to establish his view through modern science, and not Quran. As we are talking about Islam, it is not required on our part to prove our point through books of Physics or Chemistry. The right way to approach this problem, and in order to get to know the Islamic stance on it, is to refer to the Islamic texts, nothing else. Hence, wittingly or unwittingly, here the discussion will pertain to Quran and traditions only. If we cite traditions over here, it is only because it is a necessity. Here, it would be a necessary stipulation for a person to be well versed and thorough with traditions to enable him to analyze the verses of the Holy Quran and the books of traditions comfortably.
5) What is the basis of this belief in Islam? Is it an offshoot belief, or has it been mentioned in Islam as a principle?

[1] Hazrat Baqiyatullah, the son of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.)

In other words, is this creed from the principles of religion (*usul-e-deen*) or from its branches (*furu-e-deen*)? If it is from the principles, is it confined only to one sect or is it general for all Islamic factions? In other words, does the entire Islamic world subscribe to this belief and is it a necessity of religion (*zarooriyyat-e-deen*)? For example, Namaz is for all Islamic sects and consequently, is deemed as a pre-requisite of religion. The moot point here is that is the subject of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) like Namaz? So, in this chapter, our efforts will be focused on finding the status of this belief in Islam and we will attempt to answer an old question in this regard, i.e. 'Is this belief an Islamic one or is it confined to the Shias only?'

6) Has this matter, which has been related by the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.) as an Islamic principle, has yet come into occurrence or not? To put it simply, has the birth of the universal reformer, Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), taken place or will he be born in the future? Another facet of this discussion is whether this universal reformer is a known and specific individual or anybody bringing reform would be the Mahdi?
7) How was the birth and personal life of the promised one? People have heard a lot about the general discussions pertaining to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) but most are unaware about the particularities. His example is like that of a garden about which we have heard a lot but never stepped into it. Here, we would like to explore the following: the personal characteristics of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.); the conditions during his birth; the mode of his life; the manner and reasons for his occultation and so on and so forth. As you observe, these are historical discussions and scientific or natural insight will not serve any purpose to achieve breakthroughs in them. These are purely historical deliberations and hence, one should refer only to books of history. Of course, it is evident for all that it's not essential at all to find these particularities in the Holy Quran.
8) Occultation and its meaning. What do we mean when we say that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is in occultation?

9) The philosophy of occultation. This talk is quite significant as to why Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) went into concealment and why he (a.t.f.s.) is not yet appearing?
10) Life of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during occultation
11) Longevity and its evidences. Proving longevity through the Holy Quran, traditions, modern sciences, ancient knowledge and philosophical dialectics.
12) Benefits of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during occultation. The approach adopted here is presentation of the doubt followed by replies.
13) The means of deriving benefit from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during occultation.
14) Responsibilities of the Shias during occultation. This topic includes the following discussions: The responsibilities of the Shias vis-à-vis Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and as to what are our duties towards him (a.t.f.s.)? What are the duties of the Shias in regulating their societies? Here, the issues of leadership, *marje'eyat* and jurisprudence have been dealt with.
15) The plan and programme of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) after reappearance.
16) The signs of reappearance.
17) The world after reappearance.
18) The method of gaining access to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).
19) The stipulations for meeting Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).

These are some of the problems concerning Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Perhaps, there are a few more matters that are presently not in my memory. Moreover, there are some secondary thoughts that will be incidental to the main discussions.

The future of the universe In the view of religions and schools of thought

Basically, what is the view of humanity concerning its future? What are the views and opinions of scholars, congresses and schools of thought? How do we picture the future of mankind, a journey that started from times ancient? Is the belief in Mahdaviyyat, a progressive creed or a regressive one?

We observe that most religions, philosophical and even political schools consider the future of mankind to be better than his past. Therefore, all the worldviews, heavenly or otherwise, constantly strive to improve the future upon the past and the present.

Fundamentally, the proposition of Utopia (*ideal state*) in Platonic philosophy, before Christ and prior to Islam, is a style of philosophical development. Of course, it is possible that some of its characteristics may be imaginary in the view of modern sociologists. Nevertheless, the four pillars of an ideal state, as propounded by Plato, 'justice, chastity, wisdom and bravery' are in themselves a sign of positive futurism.

In these four bases, wisdom accompanies chastity (or knowledge with ethics) and bravery supplements justice. (To borrow an ancient philosophical term) why is the world limping today? The reason is that because one or even two of these pillars are found wanting in the modern society. Moreover, an ignorant society is the one that is devoid of all these four essentials.

These four bases are the factors of perfection for an individual as well as a society. The lack of any one of these signifies a serious shortcoming. An illiterate person, a coward scholar, a courageous scholar but devoid of chastity, a courageous, chaste scholar but unjust and oppressive, are all examples of imperfect persons. The presence of only one or few and not all the four pillars does not lead to perfection. But if these four attributes or Utopia (using Plato's term) are available in any single individual, such a person is deemed to be a perfect. And

if these were found in a society, it would be considered as an ideal state. Hence, Utopia (ideal state) is positive futurism.

Most philosophical works that deal with politics and civics are based on this hypothesis. Sadruddin Shirazi[2] in the end of his book, '*Al-Mabda wa al-Maad*' has brought a discussion concerning the backdrop of social governance. The gist of his view is regarding the benefits that society will enjoy, which possesses these four pillars. If an individual bears these four attributes, he is a leader and if a leader is devoid of any one of these four traits, he will no longer remain a leader. Similarly, a society that has all of these four qualities prevalent in it can become a leader and guide for other societies. Lastly, if these four elements are found in the world, the entire humanity will move towards perfection and the state of affairs shall enjoy considerable desirability.

This thought, as discussed briefly, perhaps may have its roots in divine religions but philosophical schools have also endorsed it. The Zoroastrians view the future as positive, labeling it as 'the victory of Ahura Mazda's army over the forces of Ahreman (devil)'. In Hinduism too the future is considered to be bright and prosperous.

Last, but not the least, even the materialist schools of thought, headed by Marxism, foresee the future to be better than the past, albeit using different terms like single family patterns, co-operative ownership, joint government, etc. Anyhow, they never opine that the future is doomed. Rather, they suggest that future will tread the path of perfection but there are differences in the interpretation of the term 'perfection', some of which we have already hinted at above[3].

Thus, we must accept this as a principle. Regardless of the sect that we belong to Shias, Sunnis, or any other faction of humanity, we must look at the future positively and search for the basis of this positive outlook. Basically, due to his humanity, man feels a sense of responsibility and accountability, which persuades and coaxes him to search and investigate.

[2] Also known as Mulla Sadra, the great Iranian philosopher

[3] These lectures were prior to the breaking up of Soviet Russia (U.S.S.R.) and other East European countries. But this disintegration is in no way contradictory to the discussion that the future of mankind is better than the past.

Had the future been damned, there would be no incentive for the scientists to seek and spread science. The same would apply for the reformers, philosophers and all other advocates of some thought or science. For, the research and investigation of all these scholars is based on the fact that they consider the future to be positive and the way to reach to this zenith is this particular way. Thus, had there been no peak to attain, there would be no need for any guidance or leadership.

This is basic principle and we Shias among the followers of all sects and schools of thought, hold our heads high and declare that we subscribe to such a creed. That is, we consider the future to be positive. Moreover, our positive outlook is to that extent that if we are sure that tomorrow is the Day of Judgment and only one day remains from the end of this world, yet we will say that the final outcome will be implemented. This last day will be prolonged to a length so that sufficient time is there for the accomplishment of this final result.

The Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) has conveyed the aforementioned concept in a beautiful tradition, come down in successive transmission (*tawaatur*) and recorded in the books of both Shias as well as Sunnis. The tradition goes as follows:

« لَو لَم يُبقُ مِنُ الدنيا الا يوم واحد لطول اللّه ذلك اليوم حتي يبعثَ فيهِ رجْلاً مِن أمتي و مِن أهل بيتي يْواطئُ اسمْهْ اسمي يملأ الأرضَ قسطاً و عدلاً كَما ملِئت ظُلماً و جورا ».

"*If there remains only a day for the world to come to an end, Allah will prolong this day till He raises a man from my progeny/nation. His name will be my name. He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it would have fraught with injustice and oppression*.[4]"

Therefore, even if all the angels of the heavens descend and declare that tomorrow is the Day of Judgment, we will contend that since the reformer, who will fill the earth with justice and equity, has not yet appeared, this day will be prolonged to an extent that the promise is fulfilled. Yes, we are so positive about the future that if all scientists come together and prophesize that tonight the earth will split and come to an end, we will not

[4] Muntakhabul Asar by Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 153

believe it. We will refute it as we have firm conviction in the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) prediction and hence, despite all threats of doom, will sleep comfortably.
The following sentences of *Doa-e-Ahd* are the best proofs of a positive outlook about the future:

« اَللّهم إن حالَ و بُيني و بينهْ الموتُ الّذي جعلتَهْ علي عِبادِكُ حتماً مُقضِياً فأخرِجني مِن قبري مْؤتزراً كَفني, شاهِراً سُيفي, مْجرداً قناتي, مْلبياً دُعوه الداعي في الحاضر و البادي ».

"***O Allah! If death comes between me and him (Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) reappearance), which you have made compulsory and obligatory upon your servants, then bring me out from my grave, (in the condition that) I am wearing my shroud, my sword naked, my spear uncovered, responding to the call of the caller in cities as well as deserts*.[5]"**

You saw how lovely and beautiful are the statements of this supplication!
This discussion has come in various sources. In these books, apart from the prophesies of the heavenly religions, glad-tidings of the various schools are also reflected. There are scholars, who have researched on this subject, and extracted forecasts on this topic from the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Avestha, Indian scriptures, etc.
Some have even investigated and compiled books written on Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) from the first century of Islam till date. Hence, we have books that have been written in the first century and another book, which I have in hand right now, has been penned in the second century and is a compilation of traditions regarding Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), much before his birth.

The Future from the Islamic View

The Quranic View:

[5] Mafaateeh al-Jenaan by Shaikh Abbas Qummi (a.r.)

We have stated before that Islam, like all other religions, portrays an optimistic picture of the future. This portrayal has been done in the manner most beautiful in the Holy Quran. Therefore, right in the beginning of creation, it is stated that the first creature on earth would be Allah's Caliph; it was the wish of Allah to appoint His caliph on the earth.

« و إذ قال ربْكَ لِلملائكَه إنّي جاعلٌ في الأرض خليفه ».

"And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Surely I am going to appoint a Caliph in the earth."[6]

At this juncture, the angels expressed their amazement and Allah replied to their query, which is known to one and all. One of my teachers, a highly respectable and knowledgeable person,[7] explains this incident in a very interesting manner. He says that on that day, the angels saw the bridge of Tajrish (in Iran) and the promenades of Paris and said, « أجعل فيها من يفسد فيها؟!» "Will you appoint somebody who will create mischief in it?" and then they saw the first and second World Wars and said, «ويسفك الدماء؟!» "and shed blood?" But Allah the Almighty saw Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and said,

« إني أعلم ما لا تعلمون»

"Surely I know what you do not know."

According to the Holy Quran, the aim of creation of mankind on the earth is based on the very appointment of Allah's Caliph. Thus, in the beginning of creation, Allah says, "Surely I am going to appoint a Caliph in the earth." After his advent on the earth, Allah has provided a model for him so that all may strive to emulate him.
For further understanding of this concept, let me cite an example. Suppose that a person builds a school and expresses his desire to educate students to become engineers, doctors, specialists, etc in it. After the passage of some time, when one student passes out of this institution, the builder of this schools brings him forward and says, 'For him only have we built this

[6] Baqarah: 30
[7] Ayatullah Shaykh Husain Waheedi Khurasani in one of his speeches in Masjid-e-Arak of Tehran.

institution. All our efforts were directed towards this very individual.'
Some of the traditions that explain the virtues of the Holy Prophet (s.a.) and his pure progeny (a.s.) carry a similar meaning. For instance, Allah the Almighty says to the Holy Prophet (s.a.) :

« لَولاك ما خَلَقتُ الأفلاك ».

"If you were not there, I would not have created the universe."[8]

Allah the Almighty created Hazrat Adam (a.s.), the father of humanity, as a role model from all aspects and ordered the others to emulate him and strive to be like him. But as time passed, and other human beings tread on the face of the earth, they failed to emulate their role model, as was expected of them for the fulfillment of the divine promise, and much to the disappointment of the righteous. Yet, Allah the Benevolent, by sending the other Prophets (peace be on them) to them, indicates that the appointment of His Caliph on the earth is not rendered null and void. Rather, He would send more such people on the earth, who would not only be like His first Caliph, but more perfect.
Some are of the opinion that such verses are only for the gradual finalization of Allah's Promise. Hence, in the Holy Quran, first He says,

« إني جاعل في الأرض خليفه ».

"*Surely I am going to appoint a Caliph in the earth"* and thereafter the Prophets (peace be on them) reminded the people. And when the series of Prophethood reached to Hazrat Dawood (a.s.) and Hazrat Sulayman (a.s.), Allah says,

« وُ لَقد كَتبنا في الزّبورِ من بعدِ الذّكر أنَّ الأرض يُرثُها عِباديُ الصّالحونُ».

"Surely I have written in the Psalms after the Old Testament that surely the earth, My righteous servants shall inherit it."[9]

[8] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 15, p. 28
[9] Anbiyaa: 105

To understand the above verses in their right context and comprehend their relevance, let me cite an example. You loosen the nuts and bolts of this tape-recorder, dismantle it completely, mix it with some additional screws that do not belong to it and tell somebody to assemble it once again in the desired order. Now, if somebody like me, who is totally ignorant about its technicalities, takes it in his hand, he will never manage to sort out its nuts and bolts with the additional screws or assemble it. But if it is given to somebody who is an expert in this field, immediately, he will get on with the task of separating its nuts and bolts with the additional screws and within no time, he will assemble it and hand it over back to you.
Similarly, the Quranic verses concerning Imamat and Qaemiyyat, are as scattered as the parts of the tape recorder in the above example. As we are unacquainted with Allah's Book, we do not know as to which verse talks about Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). But if we hand over these verses to the one who is well familiar with them, he will bring one verse from the beginning, another from the middle and yet another one from the end. He will place about twenty to thirty verses next to each other in such a manner that they will not be applicable for anybody except the Promised Mahdi (a.t.f.s.).
From such verses, we can select a few. For instance,
« إني جاعل في الأرض خليفه ». **Surely I am going to appoint a Caliph in the earth"** being one of them. If you ask what does this verse mean, it will be answered, 'It means that there must be a divine caliph in the earth.'
The second verse is that very one which has been discussed above and which states that divine promise is definite. For, Allah the Almighty assures,

« وُ لَقد كَتبنا في الزّبورِ مِن بعد الذّكر أنَّ الأرض يُرثُها عِباديُ الصّالحون».

"And indeed We have written in the Psalms after the Old Testament (in the various exegesis, the word zikr implies both the Old Testament as well as remembrance-its literal meaning) that the earth, it shall be inherited by My righteous servants."

So how much of the earth will they inherit? Is it about three hundred or four hundred meters of a land? No, definitely not. It is not talking about just a piece of land but about the whole earth. The definitive article used in the word 'the earth' is used to connote the whole in Arabic. Thus, the righteous servants of Allah will inherit the entire earth.
In yet another verse, Allah the Almighty prophesies,

« ... إنَّ الأرض للّه يورثُها مُن يُشاءُ مِن عباده و العاقبه للمْتّقين ».
***"…Surely the earth is for Allah, He causes it to be inherited by anyone of His servants, as He pleases and the hereafter is for the pious ones."*[10]**

Here too the servants have been categorized as the righteous and pious servants. The last part of the verse is a pledge where Allah says that this is My promise to you.
It is better to clarify this point over here that some times we speak in general that I will do this work. But at other times, we say it in the form of a vow. We practice this in our daily lives. For instance, one of our friends usually comes to us and says that 'I intend to invite you'; but this is a general statement. But when? where? Will he not regret? Thus, it is still not a promise. One day he comes and says, 'Sir, please note and remember that I intend to invite you.' Fine, we remember but still he has not taken any commitment from us. But one fine day he comes and takes a promise from us. That is, he says, 'I want to officially invite you all on such and such day, at such and such time, and in so and so place for dinner.' These are the three stages of glad tidings.
Of course, it should be known that there are two kinds of prophecies, one is a promise *(wa'd)* and another is a threat (*waeed*). It is certainly better if a threat is not carried out. But if a promise is not fulfilled, it is wrong and evil. In the case of Allah, He has threatened a lot, 'I will throw you in hell, I will punish you,…' but later, He forgives. On account of His being a Forgiver, maybe He does not carry out His threat. But if He does not fulfill His promise, then it is indeed wrong and evil.
Now, when this is clear, Allah the Almighty, promises,

[10] A'raaf: 128

« وعد الله الذين آمنوا منكم و عملوا الصّالحات ».
***"Allah has promised those of you who believe and perform good deeds."*[11]**
In the beginning, He said,
« إني جاعل في الأرض خليفه ».
'Surely I am going to appoint a Caliph in the earth'
but now He says,
« وعد الله الّذين آمنوا منكم و عملوا الصّالحات ليستخلفنهم في الأرض كما استخلف الّذين من قبلهم ».
"Allah has promised those of you who believe and perform good deeds that He will certainly appoint them as heirs in the earth as He has appointed as heirs those before them *(*one type of such caliphs were Prophets Dawood and Sulayman (a.s.)*)*

« و ليْمكنن لهم دينهم الّذي ارتضي لهم ».
***and certainly He will establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them.*"**
Where in the Holy Quran has this chosen religion been mentioned? It is mentioned in the following verse,
« اليوم اكملت لكم دينكم و اتممت عليكم نعمتي و رضيت لكم الاسلام دينا ».
***"Today, I have perfected for you your religion, completed My bounties upon you and chosen for you Islam as a religion."*[12]**
So in this verse, it has been explained in clear terms as to which is the religion chosen by Allah for His servants.
Thereafter, He says, ***"And He will surely convert their fear into security".*** What does fear and security imply in this verse? Fear is a general term e.g. fear of hunger, fear of insecurity, fear of world war, fear of an atomic war, etc. All these are fears and hence Allah promises that He will convert their fear into security. In other words, We will change the atmosphere of fear and insecurity into one of security and comfort.

[11] Noor: 55
[12] Maaedah: 3

The verse continues, ***“(as) they worship only Me, do not associate anything with Me. Then whoever disbelieves after that, then indeed these are the transgressors.”***
Therefore, all the above are promises of Allah. Now let us see, whether these statements are definite promises of Allah, tantamount to His Intention, or they are just general statements made by Him. In this regard, there is another verse that pledges,

« وُ نُرِيد أن نَمْنُّ علي الّذين استُضعِفوا في الأرضِ و نَجعُلَهْمِ أئمُّه و نجعلهم الوارثين . و نُمكّنُ لهم في الأرض و نُري فِرعون و هامانُ و جِنْودُ هْما مِنهْم ما كانوا يُحذرون».

“And We intend to oblige those who have been rendered weak in the earth and that We make them the Imams and We make them the heirs. And We will establish them in the earth and We will show Firaon, Hamaan and their armies what they were dreading from them.”[13]
It should be known that the word “*mustaz’af*” does not mean weak. Rather, its true connotation would be those who have become weak willingly and voluntarily or have been rendered weak. For, it is possible that those who have preferred to remain weak willingly could be strong and powerful. (They have preferred being the oppressed one rather than the oppressor.)

The View of Traditions

Traditions narrated from the Holy Prophet (s.a.) in this regard can be classified into three broad categories. The first group of traditions is those that talk about the immediate successor of the Holy Prophet (s.a.). The second group talks about all his successors while the third discusses about his last successor, the reformer of Islam and the promised one of humanity. Under the last category, various topics can be initiated and traditions can be further classified under them.
Initially, it is necessary for us to know that for which type of discussions should we refer to the traditions and on what topics can we rely on them and for what kind of people should these traditions be quoted. For example, can we use traditions as an

[13] Qasas: 5,6

argument for a youth who cannot digest the concept of longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) or somebody who thinks that what sort of social problems could be solved by believing in Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)? Certainly not, because such persons are absolutely unwilling to enter the field of traditions. Their question or skepticism is not related to traditions. Even if we quote two thousand traditions for them to prove longevity, they will raise yet another question: Why have the traditions supported a concept that is contradictory to science and intellect?
Then in what circumstances or on what occasions should we rely on traditions? If we consider the appointment of the Imam to be from Allah’s side and that of His messenger (s.a.), then there is no other way to know who is the twelfth Imam except through traditions. If we consider the Prophet (s.a.) as the final authority in the appointment of his successor and Imam, then the appropriate and scientific way would be to refer to his sayings. And if we desire to know about a person and his biography, then the only way would be to refer to the books of traditions and history. Any other approach would be unscientific and incorrect.
It was necessary to present the above preface because in the past we have encountered such people who have demanded that we prove the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) through scientific ways and means. And when somebody forwards traditions and quotes from the Prophet (s.a.), they refute it by countering, ‘Mister, tradition is not science. Prove to me scientifically.’ Maybe somebody might attempt to prove the same scientifically for him. But we prefer to avoid this approach and say, ‘Well, you please prove scientifically that you are the son of your father or that Shah Abbas was a Safavi king!’
Of course, the scientific and correct method to prove this would be the books of history and for every subject, the appropriate approach to solve its intricacies and difficulties would be through its own ways, means and references. If we want to establish the geographical location of a particular place, it certainly would not be through physics, chemistry or mathematics but geography. That too, the geography of Iran under the subject of divisions of states and provinces. Therefore, if somebody refers to the geography books, then indeed he has adopted a scientific approach. Similarly, if somebody refers to the books of traditions regarding the

appointment of an Imam, then surely his method is right. Principally, this is the only correct procedure in this discussion.

Hence, today if I have brought books of traditions to present before you some of these, it is with the sole purpose of executing a job in a scientific manner and not to show that I am a *mullah*. Why I'm using the word *mullah* or *sheikh* is that because some people have the habit of driving the opponent away by using such terms like 'don't be a mullah or don't be a sheikh', and say, if you are right, go to the laboratory and prove your theory. But, a laboratory is a place for a different kind of science. Recently, each science has developed its own form of a laboratory and the laboratory for historical discussions are the history books. This only will be the right approach to solve its problems and there is nothing unscientific about it.

After discussing this preface, let us come to the main topic. We said that numerous books have been written about Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and plenty of traditions have been narrated about him from both Shia as well as Sunni sources. Among the books that have compiled the traditions concerning Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), is the book of *"Muntakhabul Athar fil Imam al-Thaani Ashar"* by Ayatullah Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani. Firstly, I would state the sources of this book and then present the list of topics, albeit briefly.

Among the references of this book are Saheeh-e-Bukhari, Sunan-e-Abi Dawood, etc. It is worth mentioning that in this book more than 60 sources of the Ahle Sunnat have been used.

This book comprises of ten chapters, altogether and each chapter is further divided into sub-chapters. At the beginning of each chapter and sub-chapter, the author mentions the subject of its discussion.

The first two chapters of this book are as follows:

First Chapter: Contains traditions that state that the Imams (a.s.) are twelve in number.

It is further divided into eight sub-chapters.

Sub-chapter 1: The Imams are twelve in number and the sources used are Saheeh-e-Bukhari, Saheeh-e-Tirmidhi, Saheeh-e-Muslim, Saheeh-e-Abi Dawood, and many other books of Shias and Sunnis.

Sub-chapter 2: The number of Imams (a.s.) is equal to the number of the *asbaat* (grandsons) and *nuqaba* (chosen ones) of

Bani Israel and the *hawariyyoon* (companions) of Hazrat Eesa (a.s.). There were twelve grandsons in the Israelites, twelve companions of Hazrat Eesa (a.s.) and twelve Imams (a.s.) in the Islamic nation. Forty traditions have been narrated in this sub-chapter from the narrators of both the major sects.

Sub-chapter 3: The Imams (a.s.) are twelve in number of whom, the first is Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.). It contains 133 traditions along with their references. The references in this sub-chapter are from the likes of Yanaabiul Mawaddah of Qundoozi.

The Holy Prophet (s.a.) said,

« يا علي أنت وصيي, حُربْكُ حُربي و سِلمْكُ سِلمي و أنتَ الامامْ و أبو الأئمهِ الإحدي عشر الذينُ هْمْ الطَهُّرونُ المُعصومون, و مِنهم المُهديْ الّذي يملأ الأرض قِسطاً و عدلاً ».

> ***"O Ali! You are my successor. Your war is my war and your peace is my peace. You are an Imam and the father of eleven Imams those that are purified and infallible. Among them is Mahdi, one who will fill the earth with justice and equity."***

Sub-chapter 4: The Imams (a.s.) are twelve in number, of whom the first is Ali (a.s.) and the last is Mahdi (a.s.). It is comprised of 91 traditions.

Sub-chapter 5: The Imams (a.s.) are twelve in number, of whom the last is Mahdi (a.s.). It contains 94 traditions like the following one,

The Messenger of Allah (s.a.) said,

« إن اللّه تعالي أخَذ ميثاقي و ميثاقُ اثني عُشرُ إماما بُعدي و هْم حْججْ اللّهِ علي خَلقِه. الثّاني عشر منهم القائمْ الّذي يملأ بهِ الأرضَ قسطاً و عدلا».

> ***"Surely Allah the Almighty took my covenant and the covenant of twelve Imams after me. They are Allah's proofs upon His creatures. The twelfth among them is the Qaem who will fill the earth with justice and equity."***

Sub-chapter 6: The Imams (a.s.) are twelve in number, of whom nine are the descendants of Imam Husain (a.s.). It is comprised of 139 traditions.

Sub-chapter 7: The Imams (a.s.) are twelve in number, of whom nine are the descendants of Imam Husain (a.s.), with special

emphasis on, «... و تاسِعُهُم قائمُهُم و مُهديُهُم». "...*the ninth among them is their Mahdi or their Qaem"*. It contains 107 traditions.

Sub-chapter 8: It comprises of traditions that prove the existence of the twelve Imams (a.s.) along with their names. That is, we have traditions wherein the Holy Prophet (s.a.) has given the number of Imams (a.s.) to be twelve and also mentioned their names. It's a very interesting tradition and contains all of their peculiarities and characteristics. It comprises of fifty traditions, the renowned *'Hadith-e-Lauh'* from Jabir Ibn Abdullah being among them and which will be included in our discussion. It is a very reliable tradition and its references are very authentic.

Second Chapter: It comprises traditions that discuss about the reappearance of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), his names, attributes, characteristics and glad-tidings. Forty-nine sub-chapters have been discussed in this chapter.

Sub-chapter 1: Regarding the reappearance and uprising of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and glad-tidings concerning him. Contains 657 traditions. Among the traditions is the one quoted from Saheeh-e-Tirmidhi which says,

« لا تذهبْ الدّنيا حتّي يُملك العرب رجلٌ مِن أهلِ بيتي , يْواطِيُ اسمُهْ اسمي ».

"The Holy Prophet (s.a.) says, 'The world will not come to an end till an Arab from my progeny will rule over it. His name will be like my name."

Thereafter, a similar tradition with resembling wordings is narrated from Saheeh-e-Tirmidhi and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.

Sub-chapter 2: Regarding the fact that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is from the progeny of the Holy Prophet (s.a.) and from his Ahle Bait (a.s.) and off-spring, containing 389 traditions.

Sub-chapter 3: Concerning the fact that the name and agnomen of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is akin to that of the Holy Prophet (s.a.) and that he is the most similar of men to the latter. Also, that when he reappears he will act on the *sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (s.a.). It contains 48 traditions.

Sub-chapter 4: Regarding the qualities of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and are comprised of 21 traditions.

Sub-chapter 5: Concerning the fact that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is from the children of Ameerul Momineen (a.s.). It contains 214 traditions.

Sub-chapter 6: Pertaining to the reality that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is from the children of Hazrat Fatema Zahra (s.a.) and not from any other wife of Ameerul Momineen (a.s.). It is comprised of 192 traditions. Here, the first tradition is from Mustadrakus Saheehain, followed by quotes from Yanaabeeul Mawaddah and Muntakhabo Kanzil Ummal. Thereafter, quotes from Shia books and a few Shia exegesis of Quran are also mentioned.

Sub-chapter 7: Regarding the truth that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is from the progeny of Imam Hasan (a.s.) and Imam Husain (a.s.) and it contains 107 traditions.

Sub-chapter 8: That Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is a descendant of Imam Husain (a.s.). It is comprised of 185 traditions.

Sub-chapter 9: Pertaining to the fact that he is one of the nine Imams (a.s.) from the progeny of Imam Husain (a.s.) and it contains 160 traditions.

Sub-chapter 10: That Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the ninth son of Imam Husain (a.s.) and it contains 148 traditions.

Sub-chapter 11: That Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the descendant of Ali Ibn Husain (a.s.) and is comprised of 185 traditions.

Sub-chapter 12: That he is the descendant of Imam Baqer (a.s.) and it contains 103 traditions.

Sub-chapter 13: That Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the descendant of Imam Sadeq (a.s.) and it consists 103 traditions.

Sub-chapter 14: Regarding the fact that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the sixth descendant of Imam Sadeq (a.s.), comprising 99 traditions.

Sub-chapter 15: That Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the descendant of Imam Musa Ibn Jafar (a.s.). It consists 101 traditions.

Sub-chapter 16: Concerning the truth that he is from the progeny of Imam Musa Ibn Jafar (a.s.) and is his fifth descendant. It comprises of 98 traditions.

Sub-chapter 17: That he is the fourth descendant of Imam Reza (a.s.) and it consists 95 traditions.

Sub-chapter 18: Pertaining to the fact that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the descendant of Imam Muhammad Taqi (a.s.) and is his third offspring. It consists 90 traditions.

Sub-chapter 19: Concerning the truth that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the descendant of Abul Hasan Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Hadi (a.s.) and comprises of 90 traditions.
Sub-chapter 20: That Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the son of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and consists 146 traditions.
Sub-chapter 21: Regarding the fact that the name of his father is Hasan (a.s.) and comprises 147 traditions.
Sub-chapter 22: That the mother of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the chief of the maids and the best of them. It consists 9 traditions.
Sub-chapter 23: Contains two traditions stating that wherever there are three names, Muhammad, Ali and Hasan, in sequence, the fourth has to be Hazrat Qaem (a.t.f.s.). That is, Imam Muhammad Taqi (a.s.), Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) and Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). This is a tradition from the Holy Prophet (s.a.) wherein he prophesies,

« إذا تَوالَت أربعه أسماء مِنُ الأئمهِ مِن وُلْدي, محمد و علي و الحسنْ فُرابِعْها هُوُ القائمْ المأمولُ المنتظَر».

"Whenever the names Muhammad, Ali and Hasan from the Imams from my progeny, are in sequence, then the fourth of them is al-Qaem (a.s.), the Expected, the Awaited."

Thus, it will not suffice if somebody's name is Muhammad Ibn Al-Hasan (to claim to be Mahdi). It is essential that his grandfather should be Ali and his great grandfather, Muhammad.
Sub-chapter 24: That Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is the twelfth and the last Imam. That is, after him there will not be any other Imam. We do not have a thirteenth Imam and he is the seal of the Imams (a.s.). It consists 137 traditions.
Sub-chapter 25: Regarding the prophesy that he will fill the earth with justice and equity and it comprises 123 traditions.
Sub-chapter 26: That Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has two occultations. This sub-chapter contains 10 traditions.
Sub-chapter 27: Concerning the fact that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) will have a long and major occultation till Allah the Almighty permits him to reappear. It comprises 91 traditions.
Sub-chapter 28: Regarding the causes of his occultation and it consists 7 traditions.
Sub-chapter 29: Pertaining to the benefits of his existence, the method by which people can derive benefits from him in

occultation and the modus operandi of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in his works. It comprises 7 traditions.
Sub-chapter 30: Concerning longevity and contains 318 traditions.
Sub-chapter 31: That Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) will possess a youthful visage and it comprises 8 traditions.
Sub-chapter 32: Regarding the concealed birth of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and it contains 14 traditions.
Sub-chapter 33: Concerning the fact that Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) will not carry the allegiance of anybody on his neck. It consists of 33 traditions.
Sub-chapter 34: That Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will eliminate the enemies of Allah the Almighty, purify the earth of polytheism, etc. It contains 19 traditions.
All the remaining sub-chapters of this chapter are related to the details of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) plan, which is irrelevant to our present discussion.

HADITH-E-LAUH

As stated earlier, among the traditions of this book is the Hadith-e-Lauh of Jaabir or Lauh-e-Hazrat-e-Fatemah (s.a.). It is a tradition that has been relied upon in various Shia books and addresses quite a few problems.
Jaabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari is one of the reliable companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.), and Shias as well as Sunnis accept his traditions. Incidentally, he lived till the time of Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.). When Imam Baqer (a.s.) questioned him regarding the incident of Lauh, Jaabir explained him thus:
"I hold Allah as Witness that during the life of the Holy Prophet (s.a.), I went to your mother, Hazrat Fatemah (s.a.), to congratulate her on the birth of her son, Imam Husain (a.s.). I saw a green tablet in her hand….I asked, "May my parents be sacrificed for you, O daughter of Allah's Messenger (s.a.), what is this tablet?" She replied, "Allah the Almighty has gifted His Prophet (s.a.) with this tablet. It bears the names of my father, my husband, my two sons and the names of the Imams (a.s.) from my sons. The Holy Prophet (s.a.) gave me this tablet to give me glad tidings through it."
Jaabir says, "Your mother gave me this tablet, I read it and copied it down." Imam Sadeq (a.s.) who was along with his

father in this meeting and is the narrator of this tradition, says, “Can you show me your copy?” Jaabir replied in the affirmative. Thereafter, they both went to the house of Jaabir who removed the copy from a leather bag. My father said, ‘O Jaabir, you look in your copy and I will read from mine (in order to tally the two versions).’ Jaabir was checking his copy while my father was reading it and they matched word to word.”

The incident of Jaabir acquiring the Hadith-e-Lauh from Janab-e-Fatemah (s.a.) belongs to 3 A.H. In 10 A.H., the Holy Prophet (s.a.) expired. Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) expired in 40 A.H. Imam Hasan (a.s.) departed from this world in 50 A.H. Imam Husain (a.s.) was martyred in 60/61 A.H. But Jaabir is still alive and on the fortieth day *(arbaeen)* of his martyrdom, he goes for *ziyarat-e-arbaeen*.

Thereafter, in 85 A.H. (approx.), Imam Sajjad (a.s.) expired and Jaabir who was still alive witnesses the period of Imam Baqer’s (a.s.) Imamate. The aforementioned meeting takes place between them and the authenticity of Jaabir’s copy of Hadith-e-Lauh is established. This tablet has become famous as “Lauh-e-Hazrat-e-Fatemah (s.a.)” because it was gifted to her or as “Lauh-e-Jaabir” because he is the main narrator of this tradition.

From the Shia viewpoint, the oldest book in which this tradition has been narrated is ‘Usul al-Kafi”. And as everyone is aware, this book was written more than eleven hundred years ago.

A person from abroad wrote to one of the scholars from Mashhad, “The present manuscript of al-Kafi that we are having is belonging to the Safavide era. Do you have any idea whether any manuscript of this book that has been written prior to the Safavide era is available? For, if such a manuscript is indeed available then it will dispel the doubt that it was compiled by the scholars of the Safavide reign.” The respected scholar says, “I went and searched in the library of Madrasa-e-Nawwaab of Mashhad and found a copy that was eight hundred years old. Probably, this copy was the oldest available one of al-Kafi in Iran. Perhaps, an older version is available outside Iran.” Anyhow, this tradition has been narrated in Usul al-Kafi as well as in other books.

Now let us see as to what are the contents of this tradition. This tablet was from Allah’s side for His Prophet (s.a.). Initially, some reminders regarding divine recognition are given and thereafter Allah the Almighty says,

« إني لَم أَبعُث نبياً ... إلّا جُعُلتُ لَهْ وُصيا ... ».

“Surely I did not raise a Prophet but that I appointed for him a successor.. I have selected your cousin, Ali Ibn Abi Talib as your heir apparent. After him, I will honour you with your two grandsons, Hasan and Husain. The latter will be followed by his son, Ali, the adornment of the worshippers. Then, Muhammad Baqir al-Uloom, the splitter of My knowledge and the treasure chest of My wisdom will follow him. After him, his son Jafar and after him, in a period of utter darkness and deviation, his son, Musa will attain the position of Imamat. He will be followed by his son Ali, who will be martyred by an arrogant demon. He will be buried in a city built by My righteous servant, next to the worst of My creatures (implying Haroon al-Rashid, the Abbaside Caliph because Imam Reza (a.s.) is buried next to his grave).”

Then the Imams (a.s.) after him are mentioned till Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and then Allah the Almighty says,

« و أكملُ ذلك بِابنِهِ م ح م د ».

“And I will complete this (chain of Imamate) with his son, Meem-Ha-Meem-Daal.”

The alphabets *(huruf-e-muqatteaat*) are used because in that period it was prohibited to take the name of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Now, the tablet continues,

« عليه كَمالُ موسي و بُها عيسي و صَبرْ إيوب فَيْذَلُّ أولياٸي في زمانِهِ فَيْقتلون و يْحرقون و يُكونون خائِفين مُرعوبينُ وجِلينُ, تُصبُغُ الأرضُ بِدمائِهِم و يُفشو الوُيلُ و الرنه في نِسائِهِم, اولئكُ أولياٸي حقّا. بِهم أدفَعْ كلَّ فِتنُه عَمياء حِندسٍ و بِهِم أكشِفْ الزّلازِلَ و أدفعْ الآصارُ و الأغلال, أُولئكُ عَليهم صلَوات مِن ربهم و رُحمه و اولئك همْ المْهتدون».

“He possesses the perfection of Musa, the brightness of Eesa and the patience of Ayyub. My friends will be degraded in his time (of occultation). They will be killed and burnt and will be in a constant state of fear, apprehension and dread. The earth will be coloured with their blood. Wailing and crying will be aloud among their women. They are My true friends. Through them, I will dispel every dark mischief, remove all tremors because of them, and do away with all doubts, skepticism and chains on

account of their blessings. They are those on whom are the blessings and mercy of their Lord and they are the guided ones.”[14]

This tradition is an instance in which the name of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and his occultation have been talked about in such an explicit manner. Of course, as stated earlier, there are plenty of traditions in this regard. For example, apart from this Hadith-e-Lauh, Jaabir himself has narrated numerous traditions, of which we explained the aforementioned tradition just as an example.

Thus, we saw in the traditions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.) that while inviting the people towards Prophethood, divine justice, resurrection, and the principle of Imamat, he (s.a.) also introduces a principle in the minds of the Muslims and that is the existence of an unseen reformer. Moreover, he (s.a.) has repeated this concept on various occasions to let the people understand that the belief in Hazrat Mahdi’s (a.t.f.s.) existence is a part of our religious creed.

Aside from the Holy Prophet (s.a.), we see that all the other infallibles (a.s.) have also lend significance to this issue and spoke about it on numerous occasions. Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) says, *“Verily, O Allah, the earth cannot be void of a divine proof*”[15] and on another occasion he says, “*The Mahdi of this nation is from my descendant*.”[16]

When people objected at him for signing the peace treaty with Muaviyah, Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a.s.) justified his action in the following words,

« أما علِمتُم أنّه ما منّا أحدّ إلّا و يُقّعْ في عنْقِه بُيعةّ لِطاغيهِ زَمانهِ, اِلّا القائمْ الّذي يْصلّي روح اللّه عيسي بنْ مريم خَلَفهْ ».

“Do you not know that each one of us (Imams) has to wear the allegiance of the tyrant of his time around his neck, except the Qaem, behind whom Allah’s Spirit, Isa Bin Maryam, will perform namaz.”[17]

[14] (Al-Kafi by Shaikh Kulayni, vol. 1, p. 527, 528; Kamaaluddin by Shaikh Saduq, p. 308-311).

[15] Nahjul Balagha, compiled by Sayed Razi, 497.

[16] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 35, p. 48

[17] Ibid., vol. 51, p. 133 and vol. 44, p.19

Imam Husain (a.s.) has talked about Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in various places. In the sermon that he delivered in the Umayyide Mosque, Imam Sajjad (a.s.), while enumerating the virtues of the Ahle Bait (a.s.), said,

“…Allah’s Messenger (s.a.), Jafar Tayyar in the heaven, the two grandsons (sibtain) of this nation and the Mahdi, the one who will slay Dajjal, are all from us.”[18]

Evidently, when someone talks about his virtues and merits in front of the opponents, he will make a mention of only those qualities that are accepted by the people. Therefore, it becomes known that just as people were aware of the names, position and status of Jafar-e-Tayyar and Hasanain (a.s.), the principle of Mahdaviyyat was also firmly entrenched in their minds and hence Imam Sajjad (a.s.) has mentioned his name in his speech from the pulpit.

Then, we reach to the times of Imam Muhammad Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.), a period when this discussion truly blossomed. More traditions have been narrated from the former than by the latter. Among the traditions quoted from him is the one by Umme Haani-e-Saqafiyyah. Umme Haani is a lady whose equal can be rarely found today. Of course, even in the times of Imams (a.s.), women like her were few and far between. She narrates: I went to Imam Baqer (a.s.) and said, “O son of Allah’s Messenger! I read a verse from the Holy Quran, which amazed me no end and has indeed made me restless because I could not follow its meaning?” Imam Baqer (a.s.) asked, “Which is that verse?” Umme Haani responded,

« فلا أقسمْ بِالخُنّس . الجُوارِ الكُنّس . و اللّيلِ اِذا عُسعسُ . و الصُّبحِ اِذا تَنفّسُ ».

But nay! I swear by the stars, That run their course (and) hide themselves, And the night when it departs, And the morning when it brightens.[19]

What are these stars that will hide themselves and what is this night that will depart?”

[18] Muntakhabul Asar, Safi Gulpaygani, p. 173

[19] Surah Takveer: 15-18

Of course, it should be borne in mind that Umme Haani is an Arab lady and is well-versed with the literal meaning of these verses. But what she was not aware and was interested to know was its exposition. Umme Haani says, "I reflected a lot but in vain. In fact, I deliberated upon it the entire night." Rarely do we find someone who reflects and deliberates upon a verse of Quran for a whole night.

Imam Baqer (a.s.) replied her query thus, "O Umme Haani! You have asked a very good question. (These verses refer to) a child who will be born in the last era."[20]

Thereafter, Imam (a.s.) begins to enumerate the characteristics of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), his advent in the world, illuminating the universe with divine light, occultation, the dark periods of the two occultations, and then once again, his reappearance and its infusion of a new life in the world.

In the times of Imams (a.s.), this matter was discussed under various headings. Both Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.) were asked about it. Sometimes the narrator came in the service of the Imams (a.s.) and asked, 'Sir, are you Mahdi? Are you Qaem?' Imam (a.s.) used to reply, 'All of us will establish Allah's command' or 'All of us guide towards Allah.'[21]

In this regard, we have an interesting tradition from Imam Baqer (a.s.). The story of this tradition runs as follows that Kumait Ibn Zaid Asadi, the famous poet came to Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.) during *ayyaam al-beedh*[22]. After seeking permission from the Imams (a.s.), he began reciting his poems depicting the oppression inflicted on the Ahle Bait (a.s.) till he reached the following verse:

مُتي يقوم الحق فيكم متي   يقوم مهديكم الثاني

"When will the truth rise among you, when will the second Mahdi from you, rise."

Hearing this couplet, Imam (a.s.) retorted, "Soon, if Allah wishes, soon." Imam (a.s.) continued, "Our Qaem is the ninth descendant of Imam Husain (a.s.). As the Imams (a.s.) after the Holy Prophet (s.a.) are twelve in number, the twelfth is Qaem."

Kumait asked, "Who are these twelve illustrious personalities?" Imam (a.s.) replied, "The first among them is Ali, followed by

[20] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 51, p. 137
[21] Ibid., p. 141
[22] The beedh days are the 13^{th}, 14^{th} and 15^{th} of every month.

Hasan and Husain…."Imam (a.s.) named each Imam till he reached Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and then, he explained his reappearance and uprising.[23]

Imam Reza (a.s.) too has posted numerous reminders on this subject. Among these is the invocation that he has recommended to be read in the *qunoot* of every Friday prayer.[24] It is as follows:

« اللّهم أصلِح عُبدك و خَليفَتك بما أصلَحت بهِ أنبيائكُ و رسلك وُ حقّه بملائكتكُ و أيدهْ بروح القدس من عندك و رْسلكه مِن بينِ يديهِ و مِن خلفِهِ رصداً يحفظونهْ مِن كلِّ سوْءٍ و أبدِلهْ مِن بعد خوفِهِ أمناً يعبْدُك لا يْشركْ بك شيئاً و لا تجعل لِأحدٍ مِن خلقِك علي وليك سْلطاناً و أذَن لَهْ في جِهاد عدوك و عدوهِ و اجعلني مِن إنصارهِ, إنَّك علي كلِّ شي ءٍ قديرّ ».

"As we reach to the eras of the last Imams (a.s.), viz. Hazrat Jawaad (a.s.), Hazrat Hadi (a.s.) and Hazrat Askari (a.s.), we observe that they have talked at length on this topic. Thus, if we intend to derive an accepted concept and belief from the history of Imams (a.s.), we do not have any topic that has been talked unanimously by all of them more than the subject under discussion. This fact should be borne in mind that these conclusions have been derived only from the available quotes of the Imams (a.s.) and the present books of traditions, notwithstanding the reality that many traditions have not reached unto us.

[23] Al-Ghadeer by Allamah Ameeni, vol. 2, p. 202; Muntakhabul Asar, p. 123
[24] Jamaal al-Usboo' by Sayed Ibn Tawoos, p. 256

Realization of the prophecies

In this chapter, we shall discuss whether the prophecies of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.s.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.) concerning Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) have occurred or not. For example, it has been prophesied that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the ninth son of Imam Husain (a.s.). Now we shall see whether this prediction has been actualised or Allah forbid, there was an element of falsehood in this statement. Here, we should refer to history.

Our subject of historical investigation is whether the birth of this promised person has taken place or not? If yes, when? Who was his father? Where was he born? In other words, we will try to find out the details of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) birth certificate. Of course, this is a partial discussion that should not be searched for in the general Islamic history. This discussion should be pursued in the life history of the Imams (a.s.), and that too, the twelfth Imam (a.t.f.s.).

Anyway, it should also be known that books of traditions compiled on this subject prove that a detailed knowledge of the birth of Prophets (a.s.) and Imams (a.s.) are not an essential part of our creed. For, it is possible that somebody believes in the basic principle of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) Imamat and also accepts his existence, but does not accept that he was born on the 15th Sha'baan. It does not weaken his belief in Imamat in any way.

The characteristics of birth are not an important subject that belief in it necessitates a series of historical references. Even for other Imams (a.s.) too, we do not have traditions dwelling in detail about the birth of all of them.

Perhaps in this regard, the least controversial and most informative is the discussion concerning Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Of course, for some other Imams (a.s.) too, a lot of traditions have been narrated e.g. regarding the birth of Imam Husain (a.s.) {3rd Sha'baan}, numerous quotes are available. But concerning the Holy Prophet's (s.a.w.s.) birthday, considerable differences are found. Anyhow, regardless of such

differences, it does not create any contrariety in the basic principle. Hence, we can see quite a few contrasts regarding the birth dates in the books of traditions and history. But the 15th Sha'baan is the most famous and most authentic date narrated.

The year of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) birth has been given as 255 or 256 A.H. The cause of this difference may be because in the past, history was jotted on the basis of *Abjad* (arithmatcal arrangement of Arabic alphabet). In Hazrat Mahdi's (a.t.f.s.) case, the contrariety arose due to the word "*Noor*" (light) and "*Nahr*" (river), the differing handwriting of historians gave birth to such variances.[25] Hence, if we read "Noor", it will be 256 and in "Nahr", it will be 255 A.H.

The special characteristics of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) birth gain more significance because from the time of the ninth Imam, Muhammad Taqi (a.s.), the reigning Caliphs became very sensitive on the issue of Imamat. After the martyrdom of Imam Reza (a.s.), there were uprisings by the Hashimites and other children of Imam Moosa al-Kaazim (a.s.) in different nooks and corners of Iran and other parts of the Islamic world. Splinter groups raised the banner of rebellion against the government and all were coming under one umbrella i.e. the children of Imams (a.s.). All this led to the ruling Caliphate becoming very tense, thereby causing the disintegration of Madina as the capital of the Islamic world.

It should be known that the infallible Imams (a.s.) always strove to retain Madina as the city of their residence and never desired to abandon it. For, Madina was the focal point of travel of all Muslims and was considered to be the religious and spiritual capital of the Islamic world. Notwithstanding the transfer of the political capital of the ruling caliphate, the twin holy cities of Mecca and Madina held their own as the focus (of the Muslims). Today, we don't have any focal point like Mecca and Madina. The Shia scholars ceased to lend significance to such a centre, maybe out of grave misjudgment, or gross negligence or sheer inability of preservation.

Anyway, to the best of their ability, the Imams (a.s.) did not forsake Madina. When the Haj or Umrah pilgrims visited

[25] According to some rare quotes, his birthday has also been cited as the month of Ramadhan of 254 A.H. or 8th Sha'baan, 257 A.H.

Madina, the Imams (a.s.) or their companions went among the pilgrims and tried to maintain contact with them.

Basically, the Abbasides were cunning hypocrites and ostentatious. From this aspect, they were far ahead of the Ummayyid Caliphs and the Ottoman rulers. Their deportation of Imam Reza (a.s.) from Madina to Khorasan under the ruse of appointing him as the crown prince was a clear poof of their deceit and trickery.

After the martyrdom of Imam Reza (a.s.), they saw to it that Imam Jawad (a.s.) also was kept away from the holy city of Madina. In this instance, the apparent excuse was to get him married to the Caliph's daughter and hence, force him to reside in Baghdad.

Therefore, in the face of such trickery and machinations, a very formidable strategy was required to counter them, defeat their purpose and expose the designs of the Caliphs for the public. Thus, despite having a beautiful and learned wife (the Caliph's daughter), Imam (a.s.) married a slave girl and fathered her child, an honour not granted to the daughter of Mamoon. Of course, this was a well-executed plan to defeat Mamoon's designs and consequently, anybody who became aware of the entire scenario, realised that Imam Jawad (a.s.) did not migrate to Baghdad because of Mamoon's daughter.

In the reign of Mutawakkil or Mo'tasim Abbasi, Imam Hadi's (a.s.) entry in Madina was prevented outright. Initially, he (a.s.) was kept in Baghdad under surveillance; but when they noticed that he was coming into contact with his Shias even in Baghdad, he was shifted to Saamarra. Here too, the strict vigil of the government could not prevent him coming into contact with his followers. Finally, out of sheer desperation, the government shifted him to the military cantonment (which is called as *Askar*) where Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) was born and lived, and hence got the title of *"Askari"*.

Briefly, the Caliphs with all the power at their disposal, tried their best to prove as wrong the prediction of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) regarding the Promised One, the ninth descendant of Imam Husain (a.s.). They planned to eliminate the progeny of the Imams (a.s.) and then announce that the eighth descendant of Imam Husain (a.s.) did not bear any offspring, thereby proving the prophecies to be false and fabricated. With this purpose in

mind, they attempted to impose as many controls as possible on the house and family of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.).

One day, Mo'tamid, the Abbaside Caliph, said to Imam Askari (a.s.), "*Dear cousin, I feel sorry for you. Permit me to dispatch two slave girls to your house as domestic help."* Imam (a.s.) retorted*, "We the progeny of Muhammad (s.a.w.s.), discharge our responsibilities ourselves. And I don't have so much work that I will need your slave girls."* Despite constant pressures from the Caliph, Imam Askari (a.s.) firmly turned down his offer in order to prevent spies from entering the holy household.

Birth of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)

Hakeemah Khatoon, the aunt of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) narrates the incident of Imam Mahdi's (a.t.f.s.) birth as follows:

"One day, I went to Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). He (a.s.) requested me, 'Aunt, Stay with us tonight because my successor will appear.' I asked, 'From whom?' He (a.s.) answered, 'Narjis'. I reasoned, 'But I don't see any signs of pregnancy in her!' He retorted, 'Her likeness is of the mother of Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) who did not have any signs of motherhood till the actual hour of delivery.'

I and Narjis slept in one room. At midnight, I became busy in performing the midnight prayers. I said to myself, 'Dawn is near but whatever Imam Askari (a.s.) had said has not yet come to pass.' Suddenly from the next room, Imam Askari (a.s.) called out, 'Aunt! Don't be in haste.' Being ashamed (of my thought), I returned to my room. Narjis came forward to receive me, restless and shivering. I held her close to my chest and recited Surah Tauheed, Surah Qadr and Ayat al-Kursi for her. As I was reciting the above verses, the child in the womb was reading along with me. At that very moment, the room shone with light. The sight of Allah's newborn representative in prostration towards the Holy Ka'bah delighted me. I picked him up in my arms. Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) called out, 'Bring my son to me.'

I took the infant to his father. He put his tongue in his mouth and laying him in his lap, he ordered, 'Son, talk, by the permission of Allah.' At once, the infant began reciting,

« أعوذ بِاللّه السميع العُليم مِن الشّيطان الرّجيم. بِسم اللّه الرُّحمن الرُّحيم. و نُريد أن نَمْنٌّ علي الّذين استُضعِفوا فِي الاَرض و نَجعلهم أئمه و نجعلهم

الوارثين. و نُمكِنُّ لَهُمْ فِي الارض و نُريُ فرعون و هامان و جنودهما مِنهم ما كانوا يحذَرون . و صلي اللّه علي محمد المصطفي و عليٍّ المرتضي و فاطمه الزهرا و الحسن و الحسين و علي بن الحسين و محمد بن علي و جعفر بن محمد و موسي بن جعفر و علي بن موسي و محمد بن علي و علي بن محمد و الحسن بن علي أبي ».

‘I seek refuge in Allah, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing from the accursed Shaitan. In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. And We intend to oblige those who have been rendered weak in the land and that We will make them the Imams and We will make them the heirs. And We will establish them in the earth and We showed Firaon and Haamaan and their armies from them what they were warned. And blessings of Allah be upon Muhammad al-Mustafa, Ali al-Murtaza, Fatema al-Zahra, al-Hasan, al-Husain, Ali Ibn Husain, Muhammad Ibn Ali, Ja’far Ibn Muhammad, Moosa Ibn Ja’far, Ali Ibn Moosa, Muhammad Ibn Ali, Ali Ibn Muhammad and, my father Hasan Ibn Ali.

Hakeemah says, ‘We were surrounded by green birds’. Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) looked at one of them and cried, ‘Take care of him (the new infant) till Allah grants him permission. Allah will take His affair to completion.’ I enquired, ‘Who is this bird and who are the other birds that are accompanying him?’ He (a.s.) replied, ‘He is Jibraeel and the others are the angels of divine mercy.’ Thereafter, he (a.s.) said, ‘Aunt! Kindly return the child to his mother so that she becomes happy and joyous. Know that Allah’s Promise is true but most of the people know not.’

I returned the child to his mother. He was very clean, pure and unblemished. On his right shoulder, it was inscribed,

« جاءَ الحق و زَهق الباطِل إنَّ الباطِل كانُ زهوقاً ».

‘Truth has come and falsehood vanished. Surely, falsehood was bound to vanish.[26]’

[26] Al-Kharaaej wa al-Jaraaeh, vol. 1, p. 455, 456, H-1; Hilyah al-Abraar, vol. 2, p. 536; Kashf al-Ghummah, vol. 2, p. 498. Numerous traditions have been narrated on the authority of Hakeemah Khatoon concerning the birth of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.).

This was the incident of Imam-e-Zaman’s (a.t.f.s.) birth which we have supported from the books of traditions. In the past, whenever this occurrence was narrated, some skeptics objected that all the traditions about Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) terminated at one woman and that the validity of a woman’s narration is unacceptable because her testimony is disallowed under Islamic laws. These skeptics have not realised the fact that the tradition concerning Hazrat Mahdi’s (a.t.f.s.) birth does not end at Hakeemah Khatoon. It is just the narration of the actual process of his birth that has been narrated by the mid-wife who happened to be Hakeemah Khatoon. The same applies for every newborn baby whose news is given by the mid-wife or the nurse. The question of witnesses or testimony does not arise. Moreover, traditions other than that of Hakeemah Khatoon have been narrated regarding the birth of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). For details, one can refer to the 51st volume of Behaar al-Anwaar and other related books on the subject.

Imam Hasan al-Askari’s (a.s.) marriage to Narjis Khatoon

The story of Narjis Khatoon and her marriage to Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) has been related in the traditions thus: One day Imam Hadi (a.s.), the tenth Imam, said to one of his companions, Bishr Ibn Sulaiman, a descendant of Abu Ayyub Ansari[27], “Considering the reputation and status you and your ancestors enjoy in Islam, I want to entrust a very important but confidential task to you.” Thereafter, Imam Hadi (a.s.) proceeded to explain to him the details of the mission, “Go to the bridge of Baghdad and await the arrival of a man who has numerous maid-slaves with him for sale. When he puts them up for sale, take this pouch of money and buy a maid with the following characteristics. If the maid refuses, hand over this letter to her and bring her along with you.” Bishr Ibn Sulaiman proceeded to the bridge of Baghdad to implement the order of

[27] Abu Ayyub Ansari is the same illustrious person whose house had the honour of being the first halt of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in Madina. He and his mother gained the distinction of preceding others in being the host of Allah’s Messenger (s.a.w.a.). Abu Ayyub and his sons were always the companions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.).

his Imam. At that moment, a man passed by with a good number of slave girls, among them being the one described by Imam Hadi (a.s.). Bishr Ibn Sulaiman went ahead and offered to buy that slave girl. The man replied, 'I give the freedom of choice to the slave girl herself if she wants to accept your offer. Go and talk to her. If she agrees, I have no objection.

Bishr Ibn Sulaiman went to the slave girl who refused the offer. On this, he handed over the letter of Imam Hadi (a.s.) to her. After reading the letter, she accepted the offer. After the amount was finalized, Bishr handed over the agreed remuneration to the seller and brought the slave girl along to Saamarra.

On the way, he asked the slave girl, 'Do you recognise the owner of the letter? Because I think you are not an Arab but a Roman. Did you have any prior contact with the owner of the letter?' The girl replied, 'Had I not recognised him, I would not have agreed to this deal.' Bishr inquired, 'Have you seen him?' She replied, 'Apparently no. But I am acquainted with him.'

A perplexed Bishr asked, 'From where? How?' The girl retorted, 'Are you not among his Shias? Then, why are you asking such questions? Is he not an Imam? Is not your recognition about Imam Hadi (a.s.) like mine?' Bishr queried, 'What is your story?'

The slave girl commenced her story, 'I am the daughter of Yashooa, the Caesar of Rome[28]. I saw Hazrat Mariam (a.s.) in a dream and through her, I became a Muslim. In my country, I was supposed to marry my cousin. But my wedding congregation was disrupted due to which I had become slightly disgruntled. That very night, the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and Hazrat Eesa (a.s.) appeared in my dream and I became engrossed in the thought of coming to the Islamic capital. In the same dream, I saw Imam Hadi (a.s.) that he was saying, 'In the war raging between the Muslims and your father's army, the

[28] In Muslim terminology and according to Muslim historians, Rome implies Asia Minor and its surrounding countries. As the Roman empire had expanded far and wide, Asia Minor too had come under its rule and hence from the 5th Century A.D., Rome was divided into East and West. The Western side was Italy, the city of Rome being its capital, while the Eastern side was Asia Minor, whose capital was Istanbul. Therefore, even after the invasion of the Saljuks and the Turks, that part of Asia Minor was called as Rome.
(The Encyclopaedia of Dehkhuda-Under the word 'Rome').

latter will face defeat. You make use of this opportunity, line up yourself in the queue of slave girls, and come over to Baghdad. Near the bridge of Baghdad, my representative shall come to you and hand over my letter."

Books of traditions and history have narrated this incident[29].

So, among the accepted facts of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) life history is that his mother was a Roman slave girl, whose name was Narjis or Sosan or Reyhana, or other names. She was given different names because of the various qualities that she possessed. Even today, if a foreign girl comes to an Islamic country in marriage, she is given an Islamic name along with her previous name.

This was the story of Narjis, the mother of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). During the 15th Sha'baan celebrations, the orators narrate this very narration of Bishr Ibn Sulaiman in detail. As stated earlier, even the inability to prove this tradition, will not harm the basic belief of Mahdaviyyat.

[29] Behaarul Anwaar, by Allamah Majlisi (a.r.), vol. 51, p. 6

The Imamat of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)
And the Minor Occultation

As stated in the previous chapter, Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) was born on 15th Sha'baan. Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) requested those involved to keep this event as a secret. From the year 255 A.H., Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) was being nourished and nurtured in the house of his father but in a way that the ordinary folks were unaware about it.

The Introduction of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) to the elite among the Shias

Numerous traditions have cited that some of the companions of the Imams (a.s.) were coming to Saamarra. They used to come with various types of questions, many of them concerning Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Like they asked Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) as to who would be the Imam after him.
To the tried and true, Imam (a.s.) gave clear and detailed explanations. Among those who referred was a person by the name Ahmed Ibn Ishaaq. Shaykh Sadooq (a.r.) in his book, "Kamaaluddin" has narrated his incident in the chapter of traditions narrated from Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) in the discussion concerning Hazrat Mahdi's (a.t.f.s.) occultation.
Ahmed Ibn Ishaaq says, "I went to Abu Muhammad Hasan Ibn Ali (a.s.) to ask him about his successor and the Imam after him. Before I could pose my query, Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) said, 'O Ahmed Ibn Ishaaq! Allah the Almighty has not left His earth without a proof since the creation of Adam (a.s.). Nor will it remain without His representative till the day of judgement.' I said, 'O son of Allah's Messenger! Who is the Imam and successor after you?' Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) stood up quickly and went into a room. Later, he emerged with a three year old boy in his arms whose face shone like a full moon. Then he said, 'Had you not enjoyed such a status and rank in front of Allah the Almighty and His Proofs (a.s.), I would not have shown my son to you."

Sometimes, in these five years, the companions of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) attended to him and were narrating a few things to him. On these occasions, they were also inquiring from him about his successor, to which Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) was replying in general. One such person was Abu al-Adyaan, whose incident is reported as under:
"I was a servant of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), and carried his letters to different cities and environs. I had the honour to attend to his service in his last illness. He (a.s.) gave the letters to me and said, 'Go to Madaaen. Your journey will last for fifteen days. On the fifteenth day, you will return to Saamarra. Here, wails and cries from my house will greet you. You will see me in the room where corpses are given the ritual bath.'
I asked, 'Master! In such a case, who will be the Imam after you?' Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) responded, 'One who will ask you about the replies to my letters will be my successor.' I requested, 'Please provide me more details.' Imam (a.s.) replied, 'He will lead my funeral prayers.' I pleaded again, 'Please furnish more information.' He (a.s.) retorted, 'He will inform you about what is in the bag.'
The awe-inspiring personality of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) prevented me from further inquiry about the bag. Anyway, I took the letters to Madaaen and procured the ripostes. On the 15th day, just as Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) had predicted, I entered Saamarra. Loud voices of wailing and crying echoed from the house of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). I saw Ja'far, the brother of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), standing on the door and receiving condolences and consolation from the local Shias.
I said to myself, 'If this man is the Imam, then it will be clear that the position of Imamat has undergone change. For, I have seen him drink wine, gamble and play musical instruments.' I went near him and offered my condolences. He did not ask me anything. Afterwards 'Aqeed' emerged from the house and said, 'Master! Your brother has been shrouded. Come and lead his funeral prayers.'
Ja'far went ahead to lead the prayers. As he was about to announce the *Takbeer,* a young boy with a wheatish complexion, curly hair, broad teeth, shining like a brilliant moon, came out of the house. He caught hold of Ja'far's robe and

threw him aside, saying, ‘Uncle! Move aside. I am more worthy of leading the funeral prayers of my father.’

Ja’far withdrew in a corner as his face went colourless. The child went ahead to recite the prayers on his father’s dead body and buried him next to his father’s (10th Imam’s) grave. Thereafter, he turned towards me and said, ‘O Basri! Give me the replies of the letters that are with you.’ I handed the letters to him and said to myself, ‘Two prophecies are already fulfilled. Now only the third one about the contents of the bag, remains.’

We were sitting when some residents of Qum arrived and asked about the condition of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). When they were informed about his demise, they inquired about the Imam after him.

People guided them towards Ja’far Ibn Ali. They saluted him and offered their condolences. They wanted to know from him about the money that they had brought along with themselves, to whom did it belong and how much? Ja’far stood up from his place, and while gathering his clothes, he said, ‘They expect me to know the unseen.’

Afterwards, a servant emerged from the house of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and announced, ‘The letters of so and so are in your possession. You also have a bag containing a thousand dinars. Of which, only ten dinars are pure. They gave the letters and money to this servant saying, ‘The one who has sent you must be an Imam.[30]’

The story of this man has also been recorded in books of traditions. It should be borne in mind, as stated earlier, these are the particulars of an individual and one should not expect to search for these in general books of history or even Islamic history. For, these are personal matters and if a few traditions are available in this regard, we simply accept them.

Anyway, we repeatedly emphasize that our basic belief vis-à-vis the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is not related to these traditions. If someone refuses to accept these traditions as true and correct, we will reply, ‘Well, what is the basis of your rejection? For, the onus is on you to prove the falsity of these traditions. Even if we assume the above tradition to be false and unacceptable, yet the basic belief remains unharmed and

[30] Kamaaluddin, vol. 2, p. 457; Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 50, p. 332, H. 4 and vol. 52, p. 67 & 68 H. 53.

unaffected on account of the numerous consecutive traditions narrated concerning the twelfth Imam (a.t.f.s.). Now, when the basic belief remains unharmed, and the discussion is from the aspect of belief itself, and moreover, there is no proof to refute a tradition or to establish its absence, we shall narrate traditions while maintaining our stand that this is just a narration and only a part of the general history.

Steps taken by the Caliph to Arrest Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)

Due to the funeral prayers led by Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and the instigation of Ja’far, the government became very sensitive. The Caliph Mo’tamid used all possible steps to gain access to and arrest Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). The commanders of the Caliph swooped on the house of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). They searched it in and out but to no avail. Instead, they began plundering the house. Perhaps, while they were busy pillaging, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) took the opportunity and fled, to escape captivity.

After this episode, the Abbaside government became busy with its internal problems. The incidents of Yaqoob al-Laith, Saaheb al-Zanj, etc. took place, which occupied their attention to such an extent that they really could not bother about Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). During the reign of Mo’tazid, another event occurred that is worth reading.

Mo’tazid dispatched three officers to Imam al-Askari’s (a.s.) house. The orders were clear- behead anybody you find among the males and get their heads to the court as souvenirs. Rasheeq Maarzaani, one of the three selected officers, narrates the incident thus:

As per the orders, we attacked the house…We saw a room so huge as if it was an ocean. At the end of the room, there was a straw mat spread on water. On the mat, a man with a handsome visage and awe-inspiring dignity sat performing namaz and did not pay any heed to our presence. Ahmed Ibn Abdullah (one of us) went ahead with the intention of entering the room but was drowned. He struggled to survive inside the water and waved at us vigorously so that we may extend our hands to pull him out, but to no avail. The second one among us also attempted to enter the room and met with the same fate. I was left standing alone, perplexed and confused. I pleaded with

the owner of house, *'I seek pardon from Allah and from you. By Allah! I don't know what's happening and whom I have approached. I seek repentance from Allah.*' He did not pay heed to my talks at all and was engrossed in his own work. I got scared and returned.

After the failure of this attempt, Mo'tazid sent more officers with the same orders. When they reached the house, they heard somebody reciting the Holy Quran in the cellar (*sardaab*). They surrounded the cellar to prevent anybody from escaping. Thereafter, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) emerged from the cellar right in front of all those present. Miraculously, with Allah's permission, the commander could not see him and hence behaved as if nothing had happened. For others, the silence and non-objection of the commander was a tacit approval and consequently, they too did not protest or demur. It was too late when they realised as to what had actually occurred[31].

The Cellar (*Sardaab)*

This is an issue about which there are a lot of misconceptions. A few Sunni biased scholars in order to denounce the Shias have also misused these misinterpretations. Therefore, it is essential that we throw more light on this issue.

It should be known that the cellar was the residence of three Imams (a.s.) viz. Imam Hadi (a.s.), Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) himself. Incidentally, this house was the personal residence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). For, it is unanimously accepted by the historians that none of the Imams (a.s.) had an underground residence in Saamarra. Even for the house of Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Taalib (a.s.), we cannot state its precise location with certainty, either in Madina or Kufa. Some say its in *Baab-e-Jibraeel* but its very general place. But for the cellar of Samarra, it was believed in the long duration of one thousand four hundred years, that it was the abode of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.t.f.s.). Due to this reason alone, the cellar at Saamarra is a holy place for us.

It is an established fact that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) did not sink in the cellar's wall nor did its earth swallow him. He did not

[31] For details of these incidents, one can refer to the book, '*Tarikh al-Ghaibah al-Sughra'* by Sayed Muhammad Sadr.

disappear like the Jinn from the human eyes nor did he fly to the skies in the form of angels. Just as the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) had become invisible for the Meccan polytheists at the time of emigration, similarly Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) emerged from the cellar but the Caliph's men were unable to see him (of course with Allah's permission).

From the time of Imam Hadi (a.s.) and Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), a person was appointed in Baghdad who acted as the representative of the two Imams (a.s.). Later, on the command of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), he also became the special deputy of the latter in Baghdad. The general Shias were unaware and uninformed of the exact location of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). The special representative was a narrator of traditions and a majestic scholar, at the same time being an ordinary businessman involved in selling oils.

Of course being a narrator of traditions is an important position from the aspect of knowledge and relation of traditions. But this special deputy did not possess the customary appearance of a religious scholar. He was a businessman selling oils who answered by the name of "Usman Ibn Saeed Amri" and knew the exact residence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Quite often, Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) was either in his house, some other close companions, or his proximate relatives. In reality, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) became invisible from the eyes of the people in this very meaning.

In the compound of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) house, there was a well from which he drew water. Apart from its function of providing water, the aforementioned well does not have any significance in our traditions. Thus, those who visit Saamarra, take the mud of this well (as *tabarruk*), throw a letter in it, or think that an Arab is still sitting on the edge of the well with his sword hidden inside his robe, so that whenever Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) emerges, he would kill him. All these are talks of stupidity, emanating from the foolishness of a Sunni. Worse is the one who believes that the Arab is still sitting over there waiting to kill Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) or that he is living inside the well or that he was swallowed by the wall of the cellar.

We don't believe in the Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) who is living inside the well or is swallowed by the cellar's wall. But we respect the cellar only and only because it was the place of worship for three Imams (a.s.) and because in the length of one

thousand four hundred years, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has visited it a number of times and was his personal residence for a considerable period of time. Thus, even today when a person visits the cellar, he feels that he is the guest of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). Finally, if the Shias revere the cellar, it is because of the *owner of the house* and not because of the story of the well or any other such absurdity.

Commencement of the Minor Occultation *(Ghaibat-e-Sughra)*

The minor occultation commenced from the year 260 A.H. Why the minor occultation? Perhaps because it's duration is shorter or maybe because there was a link between Imam (a.s.) and the people. During this era, Usman Ibn Saeed Amri (r.a.) took many people to the service of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and brought the replies of numerous letters from Imam (a.s.) to them. Therefore, those Shias, who were inclined to get some information from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and desired to forward their queries to him, almost had a direct contact with him (a.t.f.s.). That is, they got their religious queries answered through minimum links and on numerous occasions through Imam's letters and signatures.

In this period, it was prohibited to utter the name of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Why? Because it created some problems and difficulties for the Shias and hence, they remembered him by the title of "Saahebuz Zamaan".

Thus, for the Shias, it was forbidden to take the name of Imam (a.s.), which was the same as the name of the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.a.). Quite a few jurists considered this edict to be applicable till date. The reason they cite is that when something is declared to be illegal, it continues to be so, till the promulgator who has issued the legislation, lifts the restriction. And in this case, its illegality has not yet been removed.

Some other jurists are of the view that this restriction was confined to the era of the minor occultation, when Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) was subject to danger. But presently, it has been revised and they don't regard uttering the name of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in this time as *haraam* (forbidden). This restriction was applicable only in olden times when even in the books his name was written as

M-H-M-D.

The Special Deputies of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)

Usman Ibn Saeed was the special deputy for a duration of two and a half years. After his demise, as per the advise of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), his son Muhammad Ibn Usman was raised to the state of deputyship. A reliable narrator of Imamite traditions, he remained in this coveted position for a period of thirty-five years and executed his responsibilities.

After him, an Iranian from the renowned family of Nawbakht, Husain Ibn Rauh Nawbakhti, became the special deputy and continued to be so for a duration of twenty years.

Ali Ibn Muhammad Samori or Seymouri, an inhabitant of Saamarra, followed Husain Ibn Ruh on the advise of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and the recommendation of Husain Ibn Ruh.

The era of special deputyship of these four lasted till the year 329 A.H. Of course, apart from these four special deputies, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) did have deputies and representatives in far-flung Islamic cities and towns but these formed the core of representation. These representatives were either appointed by Husain Ibn Ruh and his ilk or some times by Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) directly but ultimately, had to act through any of these four special representatives.

From among this second line of deputies, there was one in Qum who abused his position after being in it for some time. Although he was a directly appointed representative of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), yet this appointment did not render him an infallible. Finally, he misused his status and attributed lies and falsity to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). He put the people's wealth and property to personal use. Consequently, Husain Ibn Ruh received a signed letter from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) cursing this deputy. His name was "Muhammad Ibn Ali Shalmaghani", who was based in Qum and was conferred with special deputyship. Apart from him, there were a couple of other people who were rejected by Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) after being appointed as deputies.

In the preface of the book "Kalemah al-Imam al-Mahdi"[32], a brief history of the deputies has been jotted and a list of fifteen people has been mentioned, who were appointed by Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) directly. Of course, these fifteen did not bear the same position as the four special representatives and hence, in common understanding, it is famous that the special deputies were only four in number.
Six days prior to his death, the fourth special deputy, Ali Ibn Muhammad Seymouri (a.r.) received a signed letter (tawqee) from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), reminding him of a few things. This letter is quite well known and has been recorded in quite a few books with explanations.

« بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم. يا علي بن محمد السُّمري, أعظم الله أجر إخوانك فيك فانّك ميت ما بينك و بين أيام, فاجمع أمرك و لا توص إلي أحد فيقوم مقامك بعد وفاتك, فقد وقعت الغيبه التّامه فلا ظهور إلا بعد إذن الله تعالي ذكره. و ذلك بعد طول الأمد و قسوه القلوب و امتلاء الأرض جورا. و سيأتي من شيعتي من يدعي المشاهده. ألا فمن ادعي المشاهده قبل خروج السفياني و الصيحه فهو كذّاب مفتر. و لا حول و لا قوه إلّا بالله العلي العظيم».
"O Ali Ibn Muhammad Seymouri! May Allah increase the reward of your brothers concerning you. You will die after six days. Now, you don't appoint anybody as your successor for special deputyship because the door of representation now stands closed and the major occultation shall begin. The reappearance will not occur except by the order and permission of Allah. This reappearance will take place only after the earth becomes replete with injustice, oppression, and the hardening of hearts. Beware! Soon there will be a number of my Shias who will claim to meet me. Anybody who makes such a claim before the emergence of Sufyani and the heavenly shriek is a liar and a deceiver. There is no power and strength except that of Allah.[33]"

In this letter, mention has been made of the prolongation of the major occultation, the shutting of the door of representation, and

[32] This book was compiled by the martyr Sayed Husain Shirazi (a.r.) and has been translated into Persian by the author of this book.
[33] Behaar al-Anwaar, by Allama Majlisi, vol. 51, p. 361.

the fact that anybody claiming to meet Imam (a.s.) at will, is a liar and a cheat. Six days after the receipt of this letter, Ali Ibn Muhammad (a.r.) completed his pending tasks, made his will and expired.
This was the brief history of the minor occultation till the commencement of the major one, which began when Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) age was seventy-four.

The meaning and concept of Occultation (*ghaibah*)

One of the discussions highly misunderstood and in which most people falter on account of ignorance is the meaning and concept of occultation.
In the traditions, the concept of Hazrat Mahdi's (a.t.f.s.) occultation is likened to that of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.). Now let us analyze the mode of the latter's occultation. The brothers of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) took him and threw him in a well. As you know, Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) finally landed up at Egypt. His father Hazrat Yaqub (a.s.) knew that Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) is alive but was unaware of his whereabouts. Importantly, the brothers of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) came to him, conversed with him but failed to recognize him while he recognized them. Narrating this situation, the Holy Quran states,

« و جاء إخوهْ يوسف فدخلوا عليهِ فَعرفهُمْ و هم لَهُ منكرون ».
"And the brothers of Yusuf (a.s.) came to him. He recognized them but they failed to recognize him.[34]"

Traditions of the infallible declare the occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to be like that of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) i.e. Allah has put a veil between him and the people in a way that **« يرونهُ و لا يعرِفونَهُ ».**

[34] Surah Yusuf: 58

"…they see him but do not recognize him.[35]"

In other words, just as the brothers of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) could not recognize him, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) lives among the people, they see him but cannot recognize him. We see a number of people from morning to evening on the streets but don't know them. Or, do we recollect now as to how many people we saw yesterday on the roads?

Therefore, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is not like Jinn, angel, fairy, etc. nor does he walk through a wall (like the invisible man). Incidentally, he does not always live a life with miracles nor does he claim to always walk through closed doors and walls nor does he claim to dominate minds in a way that they be unable to see him or recognize him.

From the above, we can state that the occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is not like that of Allah the Almighty because He is without place but Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) does occupy space by residing in a place.

Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) resides on this very earth of God, walks, eats, sleeps, rests and perhaps, like all other humans, is also subject to illnesses and sickness. Of course, those who have seen him earlier and recognized him, if they see him, possible might recognize him. Thus, generally, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) does not go to such people. Those who do not recognize him, perhaps they may see him a number of times but fail to notice him. Hence, the concept of occultation is that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is without an address. We don't know where and how he resides.

Now, as we don't know where and how he resides, does it mean that our ignorance is the cause of his non-existence? We approach Hazrat Yaqub (a.s.) and ask him, 'O Yaqub! Is your son alive or not?' He (a.s.) will reply in the affirmative. 'Will you see him in the future?' Again, his response is positive. We question him again, 'Where is he now?' He will say 'I don't know.' 'What does he eat?' 'I don't know.' 'What does he do?' 'I don't know.' Certainly, he does not know despite being a prophet the whereabouts of his son Yusuf (a.s.). For, Allah the Almighty has not granted him this knowledge.

Similarly, if we ask the brothers of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) concerning the whereabouts of their brother, they will reply in

[35] Muntakhabul Asar by Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 301.

the negative and perhaps, might even go to the extent of saying that probably their brother is not alive. Therefore, they lied in the very presence of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) and hence he did not come forward to introduce himself initially[36]. There was a gap of only 20-30 years between the brothers but they could not identify him. This is the very concept of occultation[37]. Hence, at the time of reappearance, a number of people, on seeing Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), will vouch to have seen him earlier.

From another aspect, it cannot be said that he does not have any address at all because he does have a general address. For instance, it is said to us that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) participates in the Haj rituals every year and during this season, he is present there as the chief of the pilgrims. He does make annual trips to Mena and Arafaat.

This is one address. Any other address? Yes, he has been seen at Karbala too and at the shrines of other Imams (a.s.), his holy ancestors. Religious scholars (*ulama*) of the past have also seen him at Masjid-e-Jamkaran (near Qum). But does he always sit in Masjid-e-Jamkaran that people should come there and see him? Certainly not. Similarly, there are also possibilities of meeting him at Masjid-e-Kufa, the shrine of Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) at Najaf, Masjid-e-Sahlah (in Kufa), the Cellar (at Saamarra) and other such places, but not always.

Attention and Care of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) Toward the Shias

Some of the speakers, in order to make their speeches successful, swear that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is present in their congregations. What is the proof of their claim? One should not make such claims with such ease and without any qualms. Yes, they must indeed talk about his attention and care (but not to make such claims). For, being present in one place is one thing and being attentive and caring is completely another thing. For example, I am sitting right here but can see the farthest end of this room and am also aware about it. If I open this window, my view will

[36] Surah Yusuf: 77

[37] Al-Ghaibah by al-Nomani, p. 163, H.4; Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 51, p. 142.

become more extensive and if I use binoculars, then my vision will certainly improve by leaps and bounds and I can even relate to you the details. Although I am not present there, but with the help of some unusual tools, my attention is focussed on it. Of course, one vision I have is that of the eyes.

Allah the Almighty has opened one of the windows of the unseen for His messengers (a.s.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.) that whenever they intend to refer to it, they can do so. But very often it happens that man does not want to know many things and as he does not have any intention of knowing a particular thing, his ignorance is not a defect in him. Rather, we can term it as voluntary ignorance. For example, if you ask me that how much change do you have? I will reply that I don't know. Will this be called as ignorance? No because it is enough for me that I put my hand in my pocket, bring out the change, count it and let you know.

Thus, if a Prophet (a.s.) or an Imam (a.s.) says for a question that I don't know or if they question others about something, it is because they don't always use their knowledge of the unseen and this is certainly not their shortcoming. Only if he intends to know something but fails to do so, then it can be called as an imperfection. And if you question him that being in touch with the Almighty, how are you unaware about this matter, he will retort that He has not permitted here (to know).

The difference between Allah and His messengers (a.s.) and Imams (a.s.) is that everything is present with Allah. His knowledge is not made out of ignorance but is absolute. But the knowledge of His messengers (a.s.) and that of the Imams (a.s.) is with their intention and Allah's permission. If He does not permit, they cannot know the answer of a particular question.

Thus, it is possible that sometimes we are under the direct vigil of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and many a time, only our deeds are presented to him and he browses through them. For, it is available in traditions that the actions of the Shias are furnished before Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Even in this scroll of deeds, he can either cast a cursory glance or go through the details of a person's conduct. In the letter that he wrote to Shaykh Mufeed (a.r.), Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) declared,

« فإنّا يْحيطُ عِلمْنا بِأنبائِكُم و لا يُعزْبُ عنّا شيءٌ مِن أخبارِكُم ».

"Then surely our knowledge encompasses your news and none of your information is hidden from us.[38]"

The word 'your news' encompasses the particulars and details of everybody's actions as well as the general condition of the Shiite society. Hence, sometimes he becomes attentive toward the particulars of an individual's life and informs about its profound aspects. Thus, the knowledge of the unseen does not mean to have encompassing knowledge about everything at all times. Also, it does not imply that as Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is aware of us, then definitely he is present over here.

The conclusion of our discussion is that occultation means not being in a specific or known place like the occultation of Hazrat Yusuf (a.s.) or the distancing of Hazrat Yunus (a.s.) from his people. There are quite a few books in which an entire chapter is devoted to the likeness of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) occultation to that of the Prophets (a.s.). For instance, Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) was in hiding from his nation for forty days. Did he go to the skies? No, he went to the mountains. The Messenger of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) went in occultation. Where did he go? The people of Mecca were unaware. He went towards Medina, but neither the Medinites knew about his exact whereabouts in the vast desert and the cave in which he was hiding nor were the Meccans aware about his precise location.

Many of the Prophets (a.s.) and Imams (a.s.) had such an occultation and when we say that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is in hiding, it is in this very meaning. Anybody, who goes to perform the Haj, is more hopeful that perhaps the man sitting next to him in Mena is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) or that he may see him in Arafaat. Especially, as the duration of stay in Arafaat is much shorter than that in Mena, (from noon to sunset), one is almost sure that during this brief period, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will certainly come and he may get the opportunity to visit him. This feeling or emotion is not found in any other venue except Arafaat, where one is sure that Allah's proof is bound to be present there at that time.

The spirituality observed in Mena and the almost surety of the acceptance of the believers' prayers in it is due to the supplications of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) there. This topic should

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[38] Al-Ehtejaaj, by Abu Mansoor Ahmad Ibn Abi Taalib al-Tabarsi, vol. 2, p. 324-325, printed at Najaf, circa 1386 A.H.

be discussed in detail in the special discussion related to *“seeing Imam-e-Zaman”* (a.t.f.s.) so that in such instances, we know how we should behave in such contacts wth Imam (a.t.f.s.).

The life of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)
During Occultation

After the concept of occultation, let us proceed to talk about the life of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during occultation. Here, the question that immediately comes to mind is, ‘Is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) married or not?’ Often this question comes in the guise of a doubt. That is, if he is married, then it is obvious that he must be having a wife/wives and children, leading to the exposure of his secret life and people recognizing him. For, his wife would say that my husband is so and so, his children would say, ‘our father is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)’, and hence, nothing would remain a secret. Therefore, his marriage contradicts his occultation.

So, if we believe that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has family and children, such questions are bound to arise. But if we say that he has not married at all, it will give rise to another objection i.e. Is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) not a Muslim? For, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) has said,

« النّكاحْ سُنّتي فمن رُغِبُ عن سنّتي فَلَيسُ مِنّي ».

“*Nikaah is from tradition (sunnah). Thus, whoever is disinclined from my tradition is not from me*.”

How come even after more than a thousand year of living on this earth, he is not yet married?!

If he is married, then this doubt and if he is not married, then that doubt! Thus, when we see objections raised from both probabilities, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) does not exist at all!

To answer the above queries, first and foremost let us analyze the quoted tradition of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). The term used in it is *‘whoever is disinclined from my tradition…’* Sometimes a person **<u>is</u>** disinclined in doing a particular work. On other occasions, he is not disinclined in that deed but the conditions are inappropriate for it and the premises or

foundation of that work are not provided for. Or, perhaps, he has got a more important and difficult work at hand that needs to be performed. Thus, in such cases, if a person cannot execute a task, then it will not be called as disinclination. So, if Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has not married, he has not disobeyed the instructions of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

Another important point is that marriage itself or its absence is not a part of our core belief. That is, marriage of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is not among the essentialities of our faith. These are particulars that are not generally covered a priori in the traditions. Rather, this is a query that is to be put to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) himself that did he get married after attaining maturity? Therefore, this is not something that Imam Hadi (a.s.) or Imam Askari (a.s.) or Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) have stated in their sermons or traditions that our son Mahdi will get married.

Generally, the previous infallible Imams (a.s.) have not discussed the personal details. These are related to Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) personal life and should be asked from him only. Even those who had the opportunity to meet Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during occultation had more important matters to be sought and discussed than raise queries over this issue. Fundamentally too, such trifle questions are not asked. Often we are acquainted with a person for a number of years but don't deem it necessary to question him as to how many children you have or which family does your wife belong to?

For the seventy-four years of minor occultation *(ghaibat-e-sughra)*, one does not see any information or news about Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) marriage, family and children, and no clue in this regard can be seen from the four special deputies either. When the main issue itself is inconsequential, then to discuss whether he's married or unmarried does not make sense at all. Even if we assume that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has married in the major occultation, then does it mean that a wife should know all the intimate details of her husband's life? For, to act upon the tradition on the Prophet's (s.a.w.a.) tradition concerning marriage, it is not necessary that she should be aware of all the particulars of his life.

Moreover, is it necessary that from every marriage, there should be children? Well, maybe Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has married a woman who cannot bear children. And even if she begot

children, is it obligatory that they continue to live? It's quite possible that they were stillborn or died some time after their birth. Let's assume that the children survived, grew and turned into men but were unable to recognize their father with all the particulars…Is it essential, in all cases, that the children know their father completely in and out? Or, does knowing mean that it should be announced publicly?

Thus, it's not right to think that had he been married, certainly he would have had children who would know him and also let these facts be known to the people around them. No, none of these assumptions that we have discussed above will affect our belief in Imamat in any way.

In traditions and supplications concerning Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), one can see some talk about his children and his progeny. For instance, in Doa-e-Nudbah, it is said, *"O Allah! Bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad"*. This sentence is not about the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) but about the last Muhammad (al-Mahdi) because it is followed by the sentence. "*..and bless Muhammad, his ancestor, your Messenger, the Master, the Great.*" Hence, here the first supplication is for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and the second one is for the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

In other supplications too, we find sentences like *"O Allah! Grant him concerning himself, his progeny, his followers…and the leaders from his sons.*[39]" Therefore, in invocations and supplications one can find references to the children of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Well, now let us see as to which century did these children belong to? Are they present in our times today? We don't know. Let's assume that in the fifth century, he bore children who grew and died. Or, in the eighth century again, he had some more offspring. Yes, it is not essential that if we believe that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) had children during the period of occultation, then they should be living in this era too.

Concerning the abode of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) children, it is possible that they are in an island. For, we have traditions, which need not be necessarily subscribed to but there's no reason to reject them either. Somebody relates that we were

[39] Mafaateehul Jenaan by Shaikh Abbas Qummi (r.a.) under the chapter of invocations in Friday afternoons (Salawaat of Abul Hasan Dharraab Isfahani)

traveling in a ship when it was wrecked. We prayed to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) when suddenly we saw a few people who saved us. Thereafter, they took us to a lush, green island, which was called too as Greenland. We noticed that the inhabitants of this island were very good looking and beautiful. It was a fantastic place from all aspects. They informed us that this place belongs to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). We were treated and entertained for one complete week and after bringing us to the shore, they made us board another ship, after which we could never find that place[40].

Now, is this incident true or false? Perhaps, it may be either of the two. For, we cannot say with certainty that it is false. If we locate the narrator of this incident and find him to be a truthful and reliable person, then on what grounds can we refute his narration?

Of course, some people object that had there existed such a place, then certainly the geography experts would have found it by now and named it. We reply that this objection is not sustainable because all islands on the globe have not been discovered yet nor have all the villages on earth. A few days ago, a newspaper in Khorasan (a province in Iran) wrote that a hamlet in Khorasan was discovered that did not have any contact with Mashhad (its nearest city) for three hundred years nor did any government official ever pay a visit to them.

Anyway, this is not an essential part of our creed that if we don't believe in it we will turn apostates. Nor do we have the right to reject a narration as being a lie or a superstition. So, there are some matters relating to the life of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) that we are not aware of and it is not necessary to know them either. Like we don't know as to what he eats or wears. The clothes that are attributed to him are not necessarily a turban, cloak, and sandals. In other words, it is not obligatory for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to wear a black *ammamah*, a cloak, a pair of yellow sandals, etc.

People have seen Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in the dress of the Ulama, in Arabic robe and in tribal Iraqi attire as well. The great scholar, late Shaykh Hashim Qazveeni (r.a.) of Mashhad used to say that don't be surprised if you happen to see Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in modern Western outfit. Hence, it's wrong to

[40] Behaarul Anwaar of Allamah Majlisi, vol. 52, p. 159.

think that certainly and surely Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will have only one sort of a dress and that of a religious scholar and it is not at all obligatory or essential for us to have such a belief.

Of course, it should be known that although Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) changes his dress but his appearance is constant and unchangeable. Thus, if we meet an old man or an infant or a blind or lame person, we can say with cent percent surety that this is not Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). For, he is young in looks and his appearance does not change. Even in traditions one can find that the passage of time does not affect him, notwithstanding the fact that his age keeps increasing.

Vis-à-vis his residence too, it is possible that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) keeps changing his dwelling. That is, he spends some time in the mountains, some in the villages and yet some other time in the deserts. Sometimes, he is in Iraq, sometimes in Iran and sometimes in some other country. Hence, it is not essential to believe that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) always lives in Mecca. In the letter to Shaykh Mufeed (a.r.), he wrote, *"Due to reasons, I have left my previous abode and have begun to live in far-off mountains. Soon, I will forsake them too and come to the deserts and then to inhabited towns and villages."*

Anyway, these particulars of his life are in no way connected to the essentialities of faith. As mentioned in traditions, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) lives a very normal life. That is, he sleeps, eats, and drinks. We also find in the narration of the infallible that the food of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is not very delicious, fatty or made up of large portions. His dress too is not very soft and expensive[41]. This is because he has used this opportunity of longevity for excessive worship of Allah and attainment of perfection, a subject that shall be discussed exclusively at a later gathering, God willing. Then, we shall see that if Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) has worshipped his Lord in such glorious style and manner in a brief life span of 63 years, how his son al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) must be extolling his Lord in his thousand plus years- ranging from his namaz, recitation of Quran, fasting, nightly prayer vigils, etc. If such worship and reverence are factors in human perfection (which they certainly are) then these thousand plus years of divine examination and test, must have certainly made Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) Allah's most perfect

[41] Behaarul Anwaar of Allamah Majlisi, vol. 52, p. 355

creature, a topic in itself that shall be discussed at its appropriate place.

The perfect personality of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)

This discussion is about Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) himself with regards to his personality in relation with Allah and his perfection, whether divinely endowed or acquired.

Initially, it should be borne in mind that Allah the Almighty has not created all humans equal, and all that has b1een granted to mankind is not in uniform measure. Of course, from one aspect- in their generality- they are all same but in most of the perfection and virtues, Allah has not created them similar. All humans are created on the nature of monotheism (*fitrat-e-tauheedi*), thereby enabling them to know Allah and worship Him. Therefore, in this regard, they are all responsible. But spiritual capabilities and attraction vary from person to person.

What is the basis for this difference? One facet of this difference is related to two points that should be borne in mind. One of them refers to the world termed in our traditions as the world of pre-existence *(aalam-e-dhar)*[42]. The second refers to divine grace and bestowal, whose unequal grant will not affect justice. What will be deemed to violate norms of justice is differentiation in rights, but as far as '*grace*' is concerned, distinction does not enter the domain of justice.

Therefore, one differentiation is in rights and the other is in grace. If partiality is observed in rights, it is injustice. For instance, if a person owes each one of us fifty dollars. But while repaying, he pays me only thirty but pays the other person, seventy dollars. Then, this is injustice because I had an equal right on him.

Another instance can be as follows: None of us present could demand from the host to bring various kinds of fruits like orange, pineapple, bananas, etc. for us. So, had he not brought all these, he would not have meted any injustice to us because he did not owe it to us. On the morrow, had he invited other guests, and served them water only, they would not have the right to question him as to why did he differentiate between the

[42] For discussions relating to Aalam-e-Zar, refer to the fifth volume of Behaarul Anwaar, pp. 225-276.

two. He would be told that 'you don't enjoy any right over me. I just wanted to shower my grace and bounty on the previous day's guests and hence the unequal treatment.' If the guests question as to what was the basis of your disparate treatment? Was it baseless and meaningless? He will reply that certainly it was neither. My treatment did carry some wisdom but it is not necessary for me to disclose my reasons to you. For, it was sheer grace that made act in this manner. This is just an indication and if this discussion is dealt in detail, it will solve quite a few questions on divine justice.

Allah the Almighty has created the creatures on the basis of grace. Therefore, one He has made the sun, the other moon, the third as the earth, one ocean he has made as sweet and the other, salty, etc.

« ذلك فضل اللّه يؤتيه مُن يشاء ».

"This is the grace of Allah. He gives to whosoever He pleases.[43]"

The sun is the source of energy and light. The earth does not possess the energy of its own, thereby depending on the sun. One is sand, the other, water and the third, herbs. These differences are due to Allah's grace. One is a wild animal devoid of all understanding while another is a human being, with abundant comprehension and understanding. These divine bounties emanate from zero and continue infinitely. At the moment, Allah the Almighty has given preference to one creature over another on the basis of His wisdom and rendered one as superior over another.

It should be borne in mind that as Allah created the creatures differently, their responsibilities vary as well. Had their accountability been equal (despite their differences in creation), it would tantamount to injustice. Hence, as endowments differ so do obligations and hence the declaration,

« لا يكلّفُ اللّه نفساً الّا وسعُها ».

"Allah does not impose a burden on any soul except as per its capacity.[44]"

[43] Surah Maaedah: 54

[44] Surah Baqarah: 286

He has not bestowed intellect to the animals and therefore, has not imposed any responsibility on them. But as He has endowed man with wisdom and intelligence, as per their levels, He has imposed obligations and duties on them.

So, on the basis of the aforementioned premises, Allah the Almighty on the basis of His prudence, which is one of the aspects through which He deals with the creatures on the earth, desires to make the earth slush green and vegetative. Hence, He makes the clouds carry water, the fruits ripe and juicy, the air blow smooth winds, guide mankind, etc. Among mankind, He also intends to create a man who is worthy of leading other human beings. That is, for this task, He creates a man who is more perfect than others.

The initial perfection that Allah has endowed on the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), He has not granted to you and me. Similarly, the duties and obligations that He has imposed on him (s.a.w.a.), He has not placed on us either. We are relieved of the heavy burden of prophethood and messengership that He has decreed for His Messenger (s.a.w.a.).

Therefore, when Allah the Almighty intends to execute a task, He creates a creature, which is capable of performing it. Now, if it performs the work involuntarily, then there is no virtue for him in it. But if it undertakes the task with the help and assistance of the perfection granted to him by his Lord but with its own volition, then certainly it is his achievement.

The sun shines involuntarily and performs many a task for the Almighty but it is not said that the sun enjoys superiority over the earth in the eyes of Allah. But the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a) discharges his responsibilities voluntarily. That is, Allah endows him (s.a.w.a.) with perfection and orders him to go and render a particular obligation. Hence, when he (s.a.w.a.) does perform that task, his position is higher than that of others. Therefore, the conclusion is as follows: Allah creates people for the tasks that He intends to execute. He gives them the power to do that job, after which He declares,

« اللّهُ اعلمْ حيثُ يجعلُ رسالته ».

"Allah knows best where to place His message[45]"

Because He is the One Who has created that particular creature for the task.

[45] Surah An'aam: 124

Among the divine tasks, the most significant one is that one man should be able to carry His spiritual grace and convey it to the creatures. This spiritual grace has two stages: one is the general spiritual grace in existence itself, and the second is in the guidance of the people and to enforce the laws of His religion among them.
The first level i.e. general spiritual grace requires an independent philosophical discussion. Philosophers have established this discussion on metaphysical grounds, while the holy Quran and traditions have also talked about it. That is, between Allah and the creatures there should be a link or a medium[46]. Between the infinite greatness of Allah and this insignificant and small existent, there should be somebody who takes the grace and distributes it.
We observe this tradition in nature as well. If we connect this small electric lamp directly to the hydroelectric power station, it will burst instantaneously as it cannot bear the power of the station. This does not indicate the weakness of the power station but displays the feebleness and incapability of the small lamp. If you place a small pearl against the force of a powerful dam, it will split because it does not have the capacity to bear the force of such strong water current. Hence, there is a medium that acts as a link between the two extremes. Such links and media are found in everything as per their proportion to grasp the grace and then distribute it among the other creatures, as per their capacity. This is the case with the electric stations and sub-stations and the same is for water dams, canals and turbines in controlling the flow of water. In all types of works, there should be such a medium that takes the grace and distributes it.

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[46] It is worth noting that this view is best suited for philosophical discussions but in divine texts and traditions, there is no place for such a hypothesis. For, if Allah so desires, He can do the work directly Himself without any medium. Of course, presently, divinity has designed the system as discussed above and generally, this is the method of Allah that there should be a medium or link for the execution of a task. Nevertheless, the examples that are cited and shall follow, are not very correct in our opinion and suggest an analogy between the work of the Creator and the creature, implying immanence in divinity, a belief that should be strictly avoided.

This link should have some proportion with the source and some proportion wth those who derive benefits from the source and philosophically, such a link is termed as "*mumkin al-wujood al-ashraf*" (the most honorable creation). This argument has come in various philosophical works, especially those of Muslim philosophers like Mulla Sadra, and in the books of gnosis, by the name "*Imkaan-e-Ashraf*". That is, among the creatures, there should be a noble creation that is the noblest of them all, which receives grace from the infinite Being of Allah and disburses it among the creatures. In gnostic terms, he should possess two facets: one towards Allah and the other towards the creation.
The work of this intermediary creature (link) is to apportion the grace to the creatures. It is an existent that enjoys divine attributes like knowledge, power, holiness, etc. Of course, it is NOT God because God does not have any partner. Nevertheless, notwithstanding it being a creature of God, it possesses a certain level of purity, spirituality and perfection due to which it possesses the ability to obtain divine grace.
In Islamic terminology, this creation is called as "*the light of Muhammad*", based on the saying of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.),

« اولُ ما خلق اللّهُ نوري »

"*the first thing that Allah created was my light*[47]". Another term that is used for it is "*the first intellect*" (*aql-e-awaal*). Yet another name is "*the first produce*" (*saadir-e-awwal*). In the traditions of the Ahle Bait (a.s.), it is termed as "*the light of mastership*" (*noor-e-vilayat*). That is, Allah endows it with the light of existence and this light, as per the levels, keeps granting existence to other creatures, conferring this all-important grace on them. Now, if this bond between the Creator and the creature is removed, the entire creation will cease to exist.
By these explanations, it is clear that this link has the right of existence over other existents or creatures. That is, he can say that if I were not there, you too would not exist. He does not pose before the creatures but the creatures too should

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[47] Behaar al-Anwaar of Allamah Majlisi, vol. 15, p. 24.

recognize him and know that if he were not there, they (creatures) would not exist. For example, Allah the Almighty, addresses His Prophet (s.a.w.a.) declaring,

« لولاكُ ما خَلَقتُ الافلاك ».

“*If you had not been there, I would not have created the spheres*.[48]”

Such traditions are available aplenty in the collections of traditions, narrated by both Shias as well as Sunnis.

Now, the point that we should appreciate is that this noble existent and light reality manifests himself on this earth. This lightface was first personified in the holy physical persona of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), followed by Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.), trailed by Hazrat Zahra (s.a.) and the other infallible Imams (a.s.). In the lifetime of the Imam (a.s.), he is the link between Allah and His creatures as well as the proof between Allah and His creatures. According to a number of traditions, if the earth would be void of a divine proof, it would be destroyed[49]. Why? In reply, we submit that because the role of a divine proof is that of a medium. In *Dua-e-Adeelah*, one can find,

« بيُمنِه رُزِق الوري و بوُجُوده ثبتت الارض و السماء ».

“*Through his blessings, the creatures are sustained and by his existence, the earth and the sky subsist*.”

For, an Imam is the medium. In Ziyaarat-e- Jaameah, we read

« بكُم فتح اللّه و بكم يختمْ الله و بكم ينزّل الغيث و بكم يُمسك السماء ان تقع علي الارض الّا باذنه» .

“Through you (Imams (a.s.)), Allah opens, and through you, Allah seals, and through you, He sends down rains, and through you, He controls the sky from falling on the earth but with His permission.[50]”

[48] Ibid. p. 28

[49] Ibid., vol. 23, pp. 33-38

[50] Ibid.- Tr.

Such sentences can be found in abundance in the supplications, invocations and salutations. Now, let us state an ordinary instance that is commonly found in our lives.

Suppose that one of you invites a famous personality to your house for dinner and he too promises to accept your invitation. You are not bothered about the amount that he is going to eat. Maybe, he will not eat more than a few apples. But in his honor, you prepare an extensive range of meals, dishes and fruits, and in his reverence, you also invite quite a few others for the dinner. The more people you invite, the more benefits will accrue to different creatures, like the flowers will get more water, the leaves of trees will be washed properly, the house will be swept clean, dirt and dust will be thrown out. Moreover, due to this gathering, the cats and dogs of the area can feast on the remains to their hearts content, flies and other pests will have a field day, etc.

You witness all this and to each one of these, who are deriving advantage of this party, you address in your heart, ‘O negligent creature! Don’t be misled. Whatever you are enjoying today is merely on account of the presence of this respectable guest.’

Such is the system of creation that when man has a respectable guest, he extends the benefits of this invitation to a number of other creatures. At that moment, this invited guest can reprimand these creatures thus, ‘*O you who are enjoying the benefits of this party! You should know that the host has invited you to this dinner for my sake.*’ When will this honorable guest post such a reminder? When he sees that none of the invitees are attentive towards him and are so busy hogging that they conveniently ignore the real guest and are comfortably sitting with their backs to him. It is here that their sitting with their backs to the real guest and their negligence to him is considered as ingratitude.

Allah’s aim in creation was to create a man who would be a worshipper *(abd)* in the truest sense of the word. He says:

« إني جاعلٌ في الارض خليفه ».

"***Surely I intend to appoint a representative (caliph) on the earth.***[51]"

For this perfect man or perfect worshipper, He created the earth and the skies, and made the water flow on this earth to allow its inhabitants to survive. Thus, it is necessary for the existents to live on this earth, which should be green and vegetative and that the rains descend, et al.

In this manner, Allah the Almighty created His beloved messenger, the seal of the Prophets (s.a.w.a.). What affinity He had with him (s.a.w.a.) is not relevant as our discussion is about the perfect man. For the comfort of us imperfect people, Allah the Almighty has created so much of lush greenery, and made so many of the animals at our disposal for us to feast on them. And all this is for our semi-perfection. Now, if this perfection is raised to a level, in which man becomes Allah's representative *(khalifatullah)* in every sense of the term and that perfect man, sincere slave and pure worshipper enjoys the right of life over every existent and possesses the highest perfection.

Hence, from the birth and Imamate of Imam-e-Zaman, Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), this perfection of linkage between the Creator and the creature, this light reality (*haqeeqat-e-nooriyyah*), and the one due to whose blessings the creatures are sustained, all are collected in the existence and persona of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) and he is the perfect man. At that moment, all of us bow down in front of him as he enjoys tremendous privilege over us. This is one of his spiritual rights over us.

Now let us return to the example of the invitation by our friend. If we see that the guests, who have been invited because of that famous personality, become so busy in eating and drinking that they completely ignore him, and after having filled their stomachs, simply leave the place, we will certainly look at them with disdain. Similarly, the angels look down with contempt at those human beings that are inattentive towards Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) and consider them as mean creatures.

Worse are those who deny the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.). And the worst are those who abuse and say bad things about him (a.t.f.s.). From all this, one can also realize the greatness of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) that although most of us are negligent of him despite being sustained on his account, he

[51] Surah Baqarah: 30

(a.t.f.s.) does not become angry at us nor do we become the victim of his wrath.

Among those who are being sustained on his account, the closest are the ones who eat from the *Sahme-Imam* (half of Khums), i.e. they get their money directly out of his pocket. The inattentiveness and negligence of such people towards their Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) is indeed a massive ingratitude and a huge tragedy. This is an independent discussion, which shall be dealt with at an opportune moment. Anyhow, this is one of the perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.).

The discussion about the eminence and excellence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) and other infallible Imams (a.s.) is a separate one under the subject "*Imam Cognition*". The best source for information on this topic is *Ziyarat-e-Jaameah-e-Kabeerah* and some other supplications. In the invocations of the month of Rajab, one has been related on the authority of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) himself as follows:

« اللّهم إنّي اسألك بمعاني جميع مايدعوك به ولاه امرك المأمونون علي سرك ».

"O Allah! I ask You for the sake of the essence of all by which those appointed in authority prayed to You, those trusted with Your secrets."

This supplication is great. And among other invocations, is the *salawaat* of the month of Shabaan, which describes the general perfection of all the Imams (a.s.).

The Primary Perfections of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.)

Another question that arises is as to what is the highest perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.)? The responsibility and duty that Allah the Almighty has imposed on our Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) is more important than that of other Imams (a.s.), rather it is even more significant that that of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.). The reason being that generally, Allah has two levels of duties for His creatures, one is of conveyance (*iblaagh*) and the other is of implementation (*ijraa*). That is, at the first level, Allah states that these are the commands and at the second level, He orders that the commands that I have specified should be implemented.

The stage of conveyance commences from the beliefs and terminates at the laws of Shariat. From Hazrat Adam (a.s.) to the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), there were difficulties for this stage. The people rejected Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) at this very stage of conveyance. Why? Because if what Allah wants is bound to happen or He forces the people to act on His will, then in this case, there is neither the need for conveyance nor implementation by the people. In other words, Allah will create a robot-like human who will simply follow His commands. In this case, man will no longer remain human because man is called so till he finds freedom and independence of thought in his existence. He does his works with knowledge and freedom. If Allah snatches this most vital trait from man (of freedom and intention), then the very concept of humanity will be rendered null and void. In this regard, Allah the Almighty expresses,

« و لو شاءَ ربك لآمن من في الارض كلّهم جميعا ».

***"And had Your Lord willed, all that is in the heavens and the earth would have believed.*[52]"**

There would be no responsibility and Allah would snatch from the entire humanity the power to deviate. Everybody would become like sticks, if they were standing, they would continue to do so till eternity. A stick cannot rise and strike somebody on its own. Similarly, Allah would render us harmless like the stick or make us lust-less like the angels.

But as Allah did not desire so, He ordained guidance for the free and independent man that he may achieve the desired aim. Hence, to reach the desirable destination, He ought to give them some commands and the one who conveys these commands should be higher than the ordinary people, and must be able to show them the method of implementation of these commands.

The religion of God is conveyed to man at the level of perfection and every man, on an individual basis, is responsible for the implementation of these commands and orders. Thus, every man, right from Hazrat Adam (a.s.) till date, can tread on the religion of God within his own existential world and finally reach to the status of being Allah's representative *(khalifatullah)*. Hazrat Adam (a.s.) is one such individual. Similarly Hazrat

[52] Surah Yunus: 99

Sheeth (a.s.), Hazrat Idris (a.s.) and each one of the prophets (a.s.) were in their own, a world full of justice and equity. But, of course, in their own individuality (and not in the external world).

So, the possibility of implementing the universal justice prevails in my existence and is certainly not impossible. But when can this possibility occur? The moment when the religion of Allah is conveyed to me, because if it is not conveyed, I will never know as to what should I do. When it is conveyed, the person to whom it is conveyed becomes responsible for its implementation and if he does implement it successfully, only then will he be said to have attained the aim of his creation.

Considering this background, we should not await Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) for implementing justice and equity on a personal level. That is, I should not wait for the implementation of Allah's orders in my existence except for those laws that I have not understood and wait for him to come and make me comprehend them. But as for those laws and commandments that I have understood, it is upon me to implement them in my life and existence. Just as Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) implemented and Salman, Miqdad, companions of Imam Husain (a.s.) and others, followed suit. If they wait for Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), it is because they want to observe the implementation of justice and equity by him on a social level, assist him in achieving this goal and partake its reward along with him (a.t.f.s.). And if they are unable to find his time, they implement the justice and equity in their own world and wherever they encountered difficulties and problems, they asked the Imam of their time, Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) or Imam Husain (a.s.).

Therefore, from Hazrat Adam (a.s.) till the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), all were at the level of conveyance, and in their own ways, active in the accomplishment of these laws, whether it was for a nation, for a family, or for an individual. For instance, Allah the Almighty makes Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) responsible for conveying the commandments universally but restricted his powers of implementation only to the Bani Israel. At the level of execution, those who were with Hazrat Moosa (a.s.), create a number of obstacles. Allah the Almighty completed the procedure of conveyance to the Bani Israel from Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) till Hazrat Sulaiman (a.s.). Only Hazrat Dawood (a.s.) and Hazrat Sulaiman (a.s.) succeeded in implementing these

commandments among the Bani Israel and that too, their success was confined to just one people, one group.

Allah the Almighty conveys to the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), who in turn communicates to the people. These were the thirteen years in Mecca and the initial six years in Medina and its environs. From the fifth or sixth year onwards, he (s.a.w.a.) commences his mission of conveyance on a universal level. But at the execution level, he (s.a.w.a.) could not achieve complete and total success even in Medina. Allah had given him (s.a.w.a.) the powers to convey all divine laws, an authority that was not given to Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) or to Hazrat Eesa (a.s.). (That is, neither of them had the authority to convey all the laws globally). Thus, the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) possesses the perfection of finality of prophethood, by which he (s.a.w.a.) can convey all the laws at a universal level. Hence, after the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), there is no law or commandment left untold.

Now, the all-important question is to whom has the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) conveyed all these laws and commandments. Of course, he (s.a.w.a.) has not conveyed it to all and sundry. Rather, he (s.a.w.a.) has communicated all the laws to Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and hence, the day he (s.a.w.a.) introduced Ali (a.s.) to the world, it was announced,

« اليوم أكملتُ لكُم دينكُم و اتمتُ عليكم نِعمتي و رضيتُ لكم الإسلام ديناً ».

"This day I (Allah) have perfected for you your religion, completed My bounties on you and have become satisfied with Islam as a religion for you.[53]"

Here, it is necessary that we cite an instance through which many questions pertinent to the issue of Imamate and the history of Imams (a.s.) are solved. We can give the example of a teacher or a government official. The official desires to go to a village behind the mountain and civilize its inhabitants like the people of the country's capital. Let us assume that he wants to say a hundred concepts to them and intends to supervise their implementation among the villagers.

The official reaches to the village and meets a youth with tremendous potential and abilities. He is encouraged as he sees

[53] Surah Maaedah: 3

that the youth understands his discussions well. From that very day, he starts teaching the youth from the alphabet A. Thereafter, he comes to the villagers in order to teach them but they drive him away saying that they don't need his training. It takes a few months for the official to convince the villagers. These villagers, who till now were involved in a number of litigation and disputes among themselves, now begin to feel a sense of unity and see their fights being resolved in a friendly way. Thereafter, with the help of the villagers, the official opens a school and begins teaching them right from the alphabet A.

After two years, his office term is about to terminate and he has to return to the capital. For most of the two years, the villagers were busy fighting among themselves and only in the last phase, became involved in the construction of the school and learning their fundamentals. Now, has the official imparted to the youth, whom he encountered in the beginning, the same amount of teaching and training that he has done to the other villagers? Certainly not! Whatever he had desired to teach the villagers, he has taught to the bright youth right in the beginning. At the end of the term, he gathers the villagers and reminds them of their disputes, litigation, illiteracy, etc. that existed in their society two years ago. Due to these, he could not get the opportunity to teach them all that he wanted and desired but that he has taught all of these to this young man, who showed extraordinary enthusiasm and brilliance right from day one. Now, as he is about to leave, he hands over this responsibility of teaching and training the villagers to this young man.

When the official leaves the village, the villagers, as per their old habit, refer to their chief. As the chief himself has learnt some new things from the official, he picks up his spade, goes to the village center, gathers the people and declares, "The village should be inhabited!" The people support him and express their submission to his leadership. Meanwhile, on seeing that the chief has no real intention of destroying the newly established school, the youth helplessly adopts silence as his strategy. Of course, the chief has extracted the submission from the people with the help of his spade and there is no infighting among them, but the school is subjected to total neglect. Occasionally, a few alphabets are taught in it and whatever the children do not know, the chief fabricates a few yarns from his side and teaches to the students.

The educated youth is rendered unused and obsolete because the government official has taught only five of the hundred concepts that should have been taught to the people, and five concepts here and there have been conveyed by the youth to a few individuals. Thus, the remaining concepts that have remained untold are taught to one student of the next generation. This student attempts to teach these concepts to the people but they don't listen to him, and helplessly, he too hands over the teachings to a student of the following generation.

The third generation student sees that the chief actually is trying to destroy the village and hence confronts him saying, "The first teacher built the school for the people and suggested them to become educated and instilled a sense of unity among them. Now you are trying to destroy the village and its folks?! You are neither inhabiting the village nor are you treading the path of the first teacher."

Therefore, the following students too are unable to convey all the teachings and concepts of the first teacher and approximately seven to eight concepts are taught to a few people of the coming generations while the remaining ninety and odd remain untaught. Consequently, the stage of conveyance is not achieved in toto and the dream of the capital to make this village as a role model, with its special characteristics and distinctions, for others to follow.

The example of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) is exactly the same. The day the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) was raised as a Prophet, there were differences and disputes galore among the people of Mecca and Medina. In the midst of all these, the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) struggled for thirteen years and tried to make all the people submit under the banner (of Islam). But right from day one, when Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) said, 'O Messenger of Allah', he (s.a.w.a.) has not left him (a.s.) in the lurch and whatever Allah the Almighty revealed to him (s.a.w.a.), he (s.a.w.a.) taught it to Ameerul Momineen (a.s.).

Arriving in Medina, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) commenced the development of the school and taught a few alphabets. Some students like Salman (a.r.), Abuzar (a.r.), Miqdad (a.r.), etc. jotted down a few alphabets and memorized them. Generally, the conditions were peaceful and at rest but the Islamic

sciences that were supposed to be taught to the society were not yet transferred. Hence, on the day of Ghadeer, the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) stood up and announced to the people, 'Do you remember your previous state?' That is, he (s.a.w.a.) reminded them of their earlier conditions and took an answer in the affirmative from them. Then he (s.a.w.a.) asked them, 'Did I wrong you in anyway?' They all responded, 'No, O Messenger of Allah!' Thereafter he (s.a.w.a.) declared, 'After me, all these tasks (of development and progress) will be pursued by this gentleman (Ali) and whatever you don't know, ask him.'

Unfortunately, after the martyrdom of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), the people said that Abu Bakr and Umar are good chieftains. Though, the purpose of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was not to take over the reins of the government. Rather, the aims were knowledge, divine commandments, Islamic realities, etc. They said, 'They will rule better.' But the aim of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was not to conquer the world. Never did he (s.a.w.a.) desire that the Arabs should invade foreign lands, destroy their cities, plunder their gold and silver, bring them to their women, and while making them wear these beautiful necklaces, say, 'Long live Islam!' No! Certainly, this was not the aim. His purpose was to convey to the people those Islamic knowledge that came down from Hazrat Adam (a.s.) till his own person (s.a.w.a.) and apprise them of the same.

The goal of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was not that the Quran should be recited with beautiful intonation and that in competitions of Quran, readers should participate and display their talents! Surely, this wasn't the purpose. The aim was that the realities of Quran should dawn upon the people. In short, one tradition states that all the sciences and knowledge are in 27 alphabets. From Hazrat Adam (a.s.) till the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), of the 27, only two alphabets have been conveyed to the people. The remaining 25 are with Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), which he will teach to the people after his reappearance[54].

Therefore, from Hazrat Adam (a.s.) till the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), and from the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) till Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), at the level of conveyance, all the

[54] Behaar al-Anwaar, Allama Majlisi, vol. 52, p. 336

teachings, regardless of them being the laws of Shariah, principles of religion and other Islamic sciences, have not been conveyed to the masses. Moreover, whatever has been conveyed, including what is compiled in the books of traditions, is also not completely comprehended and has not reached unto us.
Thus, based on what has been discussed, it can be said that divine commands are classified in two levels, conveyance and promulgation. The Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) conveyed the message and had the opponents permitted, Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) would have completed the level of conveyance and introduced the implementation of these laws and sciences. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) laments,

« أما و اللّه لوثُنِي لي الوِسادهْ لحكمتُ بين اهل التواره بتوراتهم, و بين اهل الاِنجيل بانجيلهم و بين اهل الزّبور بزّبورهم و بين اهل الفرقان بفرقانهم».

“***But by Allah! Had they (opponents) allowed, I would have judged between the people of Torah (Old Testament) with their Torah, between the people of Injeel (New Testament) with their Injeel, between the people of Zaboor (Psalms) with their Zaboor and between the people of Furqaan (Quran) with their Furqan.***[55]”

But they did not let Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) do this and consequently, the onus fell on the shoulders of others. But at the level of implementation, these laws and sciences can be implemented in one individual, a family, or even a city. Of course, Allah’s plan is to implement these laws and sciences throughout the universe.
Now, after the aforementioned premises, the conclusion is that he who has the responsibility of conveying the entire message to the people and observing its implementation on a general scale, must himself possess all the necessary characteristics and traits required. That is, his large-heartedness, knowledge, power, forbearance, spirituality and reliance on Allah must be of the highest order.
Hadeeth-e-Lauh of Jaabir (Ibn Abdullah Ansari), while discussing about Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), mentions that, “…*with*

[55] Behaar al-Anwaar, Allama Majlisi, vol. 40, p. 136, 144

him is the perfection of Moses (a.s.), the brightness of Jesus (a.s.) and the patience of Job (a.s.)[56]…”
Khwaja Naseeruddin Tusi (a.r.) has prepared a salutation from the contents of different invocations and supplications that goes as follows:

« اللّهْم صلِّ و سلم و زد و بارك علي صاحب الدُّعوه النُّبويه و الصَّوله الحيدريه و العصمه الفاطميه و الحلم الحسنيه و الشجاعه الحسينيه و العباده السجاديه و المآثر الباقريه و الآثار الجعفريه و العلوم الكاظميه و الحجج الرضويه و الجود التقئيه و النقاوه النقويه و الهيبه العسكريه و الغيبه الإلهيه».

That is, all those characteristics and traits that the infallible and pure Imams (a.s.) possessed are available in the holy persona of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.). Thus, the perfect characteristics that have been endowed on him (a.s.) by Allah the Almighty have to be in proportion to the massive responsibility placed on his shoulders. Consequently, he (a.t.f.s.) has to be the most perfect of all the previous successors and divine proofs.

The Acquired Perfections of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.)

As for the acquired perfect characteristics, it should be borne in mind that basically the importance of perfection is from both aspects, quantity as well as quantity. The more units of *salaat* that a person prays, the more perfection he acquires. The perfection of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) after thirteen years of Prophethood was certainly more than it was at the commencement of his mission. Similarly, his perfection at the end of his life was certainly more than at the time of his migration.
Therefore, the more one prays, the more perfection he attains; the more one struggles, the more excellence he secures. The same yardstick applies for *tableegh*, services to Islam, and all other forms of worship and recommended acts.
Hence, among the duties of a Muslim is to preserve his physical health and safety that he may use it more in the way of Allah. It is his obligation to use this world as a field to the maximum

[56] Ayyub in Arabic

possible extent to reap the highest possible dividends in the hereafter. Due to this reason, suicide is prohibited. Moreover, it is not allowed in Islam to put one's body in unnecessary and needless trouble.
For this very reason we see that the Imams (a.s.), notwithstanding their great zeal in meeting their Lord (*leqaaullah*), strove till the last moments of their lives to increase their worship and augment their good deeds.
On the eve of Aashura, Imam Husain (a.s.) requested the enemies to give a night's time to indulge in more worship of his Lord and increase his good deeds in the short period available. Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) knew that he would be martyred on the morrow, yet spends the entire night in prayers. All the infallible Imams (a.s.) endeavored till the last breath of their lives to increase their perfection and virtues.
Of course, there are some virtues, whose rewards are reaped by man even after his death but they are only after he has performed the actions. For instance, a man plants a tree, the fruits of which are enjoyed by others even after his death. But, the dead man cannot plant a new tree. The rewards of a believer's excellence never cease and its door is never shut. Rather, they are added to his account and the advantage is in his favour. But he does not live to add newer sources of rewards for his hereafter.
Thus, whoever kills a friend of Allah has indeed oppressed him. True, the victim has attained martyrdom but it does not mean that he kisses the hand of the killer in gratitude saying, 'Thank you very much! You have helped me achieved this great status! Indeed you have obliged me by sending me away from this world!' Of course not! On the contrary, he will confront him saying that you have deprived me of many a grace. Had I been alive, I could have served Islam and Muslims even more. Hence, killers and assassins have not obliged the martyrs by helping them attain the stage of martyrdom and being in the company of Allah.
Therefore, it can be asserted that acquired perfection, both qualitatively as well as quantitatively, can be increased, and the more the better. On this basis, the units of prayers by Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) are surely more than that of other Imams (a.s.). Why? Because more than one thousand one hundred and sixty seven years of his life has passed, during which, he (a.t.f.s.) has

performed *Namaz-e-Shab*, fasted, served the creatures, helped in dispelling the difficulties of the people, etc.
Compared to the previous divine proofs (a.s.), he (a.t.f.s.) has worked more for the uplift of the downtrodden, visited the sick, participated in funeral processions, propagated the religion of Allah, etc. Although his work has not yet reached to its logical conclusion due to the various obstacles and impediments that arose in his way, nevertheless, in this lengthy period, certainly his acquired perfection has risen by the second. In this extensive term, he (a.t.f.s.) has indulged in supplications in the service of his Lord, prostrated before Him, bowed in front of Him, and other similar acts of worship and servitude have made him (a.t.f.s.) spiritually gigantic.
Another most important acquired perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) is his confinement. What is confinement? The gnostics and the sufis draw a line for their disciples and order them not to go beyond it. This line is that of asceticism. Well, for how long should we not cross it? Let us say, ten hours. Being patient for these ten long hours leads to the perfection of the disciple's soul.
Or for example, none of us have any work outside this house for now. But if we just call it as a prison, the next two hours will seem like an age passed. There are quite a few days when man does not eat food for the entire length of the day and does not even feel the pangs of hunger. But when you name this very day as 'fast' (*saum*), at eight in the morning, he becomes thirsty, at nine, he becomes hungry and feels the twinge of both. This line is the line of asceticism for, '*Man is greedy for what is forbidden*.'
This pressure, patience and forbearance make man perfect. It is among the great attributes of the infallible Imams (a.s.) that they bear insults of the people but as Allah the Almighty has refrained them from using their celestial powers, they don't do so.
Bearing this point in mind, we see that during the last eleven hundred years and more, Allah says to Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), 'Keep yourself hidden from the people…' This very command carries tremendous significance.
Sometimes, a speaker is atop the pulpit and recites a Quranic verse. A person, who is sitting down and knows the verse too, starts reading it aloud so that those around in the gathering may

know that he is also aware of the verse. This person has the knowledge but no self-control and cannot avoid ostentation of the self. But the perfect man sits in front of the pulpit with complete silence like a kid, so much so that the speaker considers him to be an illiterate person. Of course, this is a fine ethical point that requires more discussion.

Now you can imagine the perfection of he who is angel-faced but conceals his appearance, handsome but doesn't show himself to the people, knowledgeable but doesn't express his knowledge in front of others, powerful but does not use force, can take revenge but due to Allah's command, refrains from vindictiveness…

You observe that more than eleven hundred years have passed, Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) is the most knowledgeable of mankind but Allah the Almighty has ordered him not to manifest his information for the commonality. He (a.t.f.s.) possesses true power and all these so-called super powers, use their power to the hilt but Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) never displays his might in front of others. He (a.t.f.s.) is handsome but unlike other good looking people who always desire to flaunt their looks, he (a.t.f.s.) never shows himself to people unless Allah the Almighty permits him to do so. Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) sees all these difficulties and problems, and can come and bring an end to all this misery but is patient and forbearing.

For instance, he (a.t.f.s.) has witnessed the entire Iran-Iraq war and must have definitely been pained at the mass killings on both sides. Yet, on the command of Allah, he (a.t.f.s.) bears patience. Can Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) act in violation of the divine commands? Of course, he is free like us and can do so but does not.

Yes, staying within the confines of the line of self-restrain for the last eleven hundred years and more has made Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) an infinite person. It is on account of these perfection that all the angels have become his servants and all the Prophets (a.s.) envy him. The successors and divine proofs are all waiting for him (a.t.f.s.) in order to serve him (a.t.f.s.).

When Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) looks at Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), he takes a glance at that moment of his life when he could not control himself and boxed the Egyptian to death and consequently, fled the city. Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) could not discipline the force that he possessed in attacking the Egyptian.

Although, while committing this act, Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) has not perpetrated any sin but it would certainly have been better had he not attacked the Egyptian and restrained himself. This very Moosa (a.s.), when sees from the world of Barzakh, how Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), despite possessing all the powers of yore as well as the morrow, does not use it simply because Allah has not given him the permission. Still Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) is within the confines of the lines and is careful about implementing the commands of Allah the Almighty.

Thus, if we understand this point, we realize that the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) for us is that of a perfect man and that he (a.t.f.s.) is the Caliph of Allah in its entirety. As the era of his occultation increases, his acquired perfection and divine perfection is aggrandized.

The Endowed Perfection of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)

Alongside acquired perfection, there exists a gifted or endowed perfection from the side of somebody else and it differs from the previous mentioned perfect traits or attributes.

Let us explain endowed perfection with an example. Suppose that you are unaware of a thing and personally want to acquire its knowledge. You have to browse through a few books and spend a few hours in order to acquire it. Instead of this effort, if someone comes across and makes you aware of the entire concept in a jiffy, that is, presents this knowledge to you on a platter. So, you have got a new perfection, which was neither present in you at the time of birth nor have you attained it through your efforts. Rather, it has been gifted to you and you have become its owner. Or like in material perfection, one man toils from morning till evening, works hard and sweats to earn a couple of hundred dollars. Meanwhile, there walks in another person who hands over two hundred dollars to him and makes him the owner of this wealth.

Spiritual perfection is also the same. That is, I commit a sin and usurp the rights of the people. To compensate for this perpetration, I should strive to earn money and pay the aggrieved party. But somebody walks in and reimburses the victims on my behalf, eases my struggle and consequently, my crime is forgiven. Of course, the element in my forgiveness is

the one who has indemnified the right of the people on my behalf.
Another example is that of a person who goes for Hajj and bears numerous difficulties in performing its various rituals. But suppose, he appoints me as his representative and sends me to perform all the tedious and tiresome rituals on his behalf. Then, although I am the one who has borne all the difficulties, the reward is written in his name as well, as I was ***his*** nominee. Consequently, his perfection is augmented due to my efforts.
This endowment can take place during the life of a man or after his death. After the death of the Messenger of Islam the Muslims have gifted numerous perfection to him (s.a.w.a.). The reward of every statement of '*There is no god but Allah*' that is uttered goes in his (s.a.w.a.) account. Whenever a person recites *salawaat* in any nook or corner of the world, its dividend reaches to him (s.a.w.a.). The same applies for prayers, fasting and all other obligatory and recommended actions. Of course, the performer of all the above actions too is eligible for his share of the reward. For, when I perform a good deed on your behalf, both of us reap the dividends for it without the reward of either of us being reduced.
One of the gifted perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) is the salutation offered to him by the previous divine proofs, jurists, believers and followers. Thus, when a person recites *salawaat* and sends salutations in the following *ziyaarat* every morning after the obligatory prayers,

« اللّهم بَلِّغ مولاي صاحبُ الزَّمان صلوات اللّه عليه عن جميع المؤمنين و المؤمنات في مشارق الارض و مغاربها و برها و بحرها و سهلها و جبلها, حيهم و ميتهم و عن والدي و ولدي و عني من الصَّلوات و التَّحيات زنه عرش اللّه ».

its reward goes to the account of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) as well[57].
Here, we have opened another account, which is the account of perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) offered to him (a.t.f.s.) by the previous divine proofs, jurists, martyrs, believing men and women. None can match Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) in this perfection

[57] Mafaateeh al-Jenaan by Shaikh Abbas Qummi, in the chapter of Ziyaaraat of Hazrat Baqiyatullah (a.t.f.s.) after Dua-e-Nudbah.

or be his equal. In this very Masjid-e-Jamkaran, where you have the privilege of congregating, there are numerous people who repent and seek forgiveness in the name of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), supplicate, invoke, send salutations, etc. All these acts of worship and servitude are performed on behalf of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.). Therefore, one of our duties in the major occultation is to do good deeds on his behalf.
To summarize the discussion, we have discussed three stages of perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.).

- The perfection that has been ***divinely endowed*** to perform the important task of conveying Allah's message and its implementation;
- The ***acquired*** perfection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.);
- The ***gifted perfection*** of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) that has been conferred on him by others through their acts and good deeds, a series that commenced from the time of Hazrat Adam (a.s.) and has continued through the chain of Prophets (a.s.), Nuh (a.s.), Ibrahim (a.s.) Moosa (a.s.), Eesa (a.s.) and even the last Prophet, Hazrat Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) prays for him (a.t.f.s.). Imam Sadeq (a.s.) too has offered the Dua-e-Nudbah as a compliment before the birth of his descendant, Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.).

*Therefore, the preparations and arrangements have begun right from the time of Hazrat Adam (a.s.), without any formality, and continued till his birth and after it through the four special deputies, scholars, jurists, believers, righteous ones, martyrs, truthful ones, etc. Hence, in the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), we have a total and complete human being in all respect. Instead of visiting the shrines and tombs of lesser mortals and invoking inferior humans, let us take the first step and cry out from the depths of our hearts, '*O Saaheb al-Zamaan*' and ask from him (a.t.f.s.) whatever one desires. On the subject of perfection, we have some other discussions that shall be set fortht in their appropriate places.*

LONGEVITY

A discussion that should be dealt with independently is that of longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)-A point that is often treated with cynicism and skepticism. It is a cause of deviation of many a group in the long course of history, particularly in the last hundred years or so.

At the first level, we shall analyze longevity from the angle of proving it, so that we may see as to what is the reason that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is alive for such a long period. Thereafter, the mode of his life in this era and the standard of effect of longevity on his physique will be investigated. Initially, the discussion shall be examined from the aspect of traditions and Islamic texts, followed by the presentation of doubts and then from various angles, their replies will be given.

The Sunnis have accepted the belief in Mahdaviyat in principle and many of their prominent scholars have even confessed to the fact that he (a.t.f.s.) is from the progeny of Hazrat Zahra (s.a.) and Imam Husain (a.s.). But they have not acknowledged that he (a.t.f.s.) is alive and has a long life. Rather, they are of the view that he (a.t.f.s.) will be born in the last era.

Some of them (Sunnis) opine that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is dead and will be reborn because there are some traditions that declare, "*He will rise after his death*[58]". Relying on this tradition, they subscribe to the view that he (a.t.f.s.) will die and be resurrected. In response to this group, we state that this tradition implies the death of his remembrance (and not Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) himself), as we have in some traditions, *'He will rise after the death of his remembrance (from the minds of the people)'*[59].

Anyway, there are some who believe in the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) but do not consider him to be alive during occultation and are of the view that occultation means to die, to be given a new life and finally, to bring a revolution. Of course,

[58] Behaar al-Anwaar, Allama Majlisi, vol. 51, p. 30, H.6
[59] Ibid. H.4

there are few takers for this theory. For, people either reject the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), or believe Imamate to be position-oriented (and not person-oriented)[60]. Or, if they think him (a.t.f.s.) to be the son of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), then wittingly or unwittingly, they subscribe to the theory of longevity.

Traditions Concerning Longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)

[60] There are very few in the Islamic world, who consider Prophethood and Messengership to be position-oriented (*nau'ee*). That is, they don't believe that anybody can possess the conditions of Prophethood, receive revelation from Allah and claim Prophethood among the people. Rather, they believe Prophethood to be person-oriented and consider the appointment of a Prophet as a prerogative of Allah and deem a Prophet to be from the side of Allah. But in the case of Wilayat, Imamate and leadership of the *Ummah*, most of the Sunnis and some of the Sufis (Gnostics) reckon it to be position oriented. They opine that anybody can attain the status of Imamate and leadership through worship, self-development and treading the path of gnosticism. Thereafter, he has some effect in the world of creation and is effectual in it and also takes control of the reins of the people in his hand, particularly those who tread the path of Sufism, and becomes their pivot, guide and master. They regard the door of Wilayat as open for anybody and think that he who has the capacity of treading the path of Sufism (*Sair-o-Suluk*) under the guidance of a pivot (*qutb*) can reach to this venerable position. Often, they use the term Wilayah for Imamate, and like the former, they consider Imamate as an attainable position for the students of their schools.

But in the creed of Ithna Ashari Shiism, Imamate, like Prophethood, is person-oriented and limited, and regard its affair to be in the hands of Allah. It is only Allah the Almighty, Who appoints a few, limited people to this esteemed and honourable position. He has instilled in them the necessary and required conditions for this great status and created them with volition, which is of course a pre-requisite. He has made the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) introduce them to the people just as He made the previous Prophets (a.s.) familiarize their successors to their nations. Hence, on the basis of the famous quote of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), *'After me, there will be twelve successors, first of them is Ali and the last, Mahdi*", if somebody considers Imamate as an attainable position and does not deem it to be limited and confined to a few people, then indeed such an idea emanates from ignorance or disbelief in the tenets of the Ithna Ashari faith and is in direct contradiction to its creed.

We have numerous traditions from the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) as well as the infallible Imams (a.s.)
regarding the longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). In these quotes, just as the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and his successors (a.s.) have talked about occultation itself, its peculiarities, etc., they have spoken about longevity as well. For instance,

« إنَّ لِقائم منّا غيبه يطول امدْها ».

"Surely for the Qaem among us, there is an occultation, the duration of which will be long.[61]"

This tradition is from Imam Sadeq (a.s.). In another quote, Imam Zainul Aabedeen (a.s.), the fourth Imam, says, "*In Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), there are a few characteristics of the previous prophets. Among them is longevity, which was available in Hazrat Adam (a.s.) and Hazrat Nuh (a.s.)[62].*" The aforementioned statement is found frequently in the traditions of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.). Longevity is among the peculiarities of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) so that if somebody claims this eminent position, in the absence of this important characteristic, indeed his falsehood and lie will be proved and established for one and all. Thus, longevity is an distinguished particularity of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), much before his birth, endorsed by traditions from both Shia as well as Sunni references. Imam Reza (a.s.) foretells,

« إذا خرج كان في سن الشّيوخ و منظر الشّباب ».

"*When (Mahdi) reappears, he will be old in age but young in appearance*.[63]"

Another tradition predicts,

« و إن من علاماته أن لا يهرم بمرور الأيام و اللّيالي ».

"*And from his signs is that he will not become old by the passage of days and nights*.[64]"

So, it is our belief that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is alive and during this period, with the passing of the days and the nights,

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[61] Behaar al-Anwaar, vol. 51, p. 142
[62] Ibid. p. 217
[63] Ibid. vol. 52, p. 322
[64] Muntakhab al-Asar, Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 285

he grows in age like all of us, but his appearance does not change and remains like that of a youth. In the just mentioned tradition, it is said that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will look like a forty year old man or even lesser.
In yet another quote, a person came to Imam Baqer (a.s.) and asked, '*Are you the one who will kill the enemies of Allah*?' He (a.s.) replied, '*How can I be that person when I am already forty-five years old*?![65]"
Thus, the existence of longevity and youthful appearance simultaneously, in Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has been mentioned as his distinct characteristics, singular only to him and none else, as found in the aforementioned citations of the infallible Imams (a.s.).

Answer to the Objections

Now let us proceed to the objections and doubts pertinent to longevity. Initially, it should be borne in mind that principally, in religious discussions, most of the doubts that are raised, are mostly questions. For, in such debates, we have two kinds of queries: questions and doubts.
In solving matters related to our creed, the first step that we take is to ask the opponent: Is the point you are raising a question or a doubt?
For, a question is something that a man does not know but a doubt is that about which he knows but is skeptical of. For instance, if I ask the value of the carpet spread on the floor, it is a question, because I am not aware of its price. My interest lies in knowing the consideration of the carpet. But if I ask as to *why* is the carpet spread over here, then this is a doubt and not a question because I am not unaware of the carpet being spread over the floor. I know that it's there and nothing about it is concealed from me but I don't agree to the propriety of it being laid in the place it is kept. Hence, this is a doubt.
Most of the religious questions that arise in the minds of the people as doubts, if evaluated scientifically, will clarify that these are not doubts but genuine questions that need to be elucidated. Thus, the first step that we must take is to bring the opponent down from the position of a skeptic to that of an

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[65] Behaar al-Anwaar, vol. 51, p. 141

unaware person. Thereafter, we must evaluate whether his question is from the necessary and obligatory beliefs or is it otherwise? If it is from the former, then his question *must* be answered. But if it's from the non-obligatory kind of question, then even if we don't answer it, will not be very harmful because in life, there are *n* number of queries that are still left unanswered and unattended to. Like, questions relating to the seas, the oceans, the jungles, the skies, the levels of earth, matter, atom, etc. remain to be replied and hence, there is no problem if, along with these millions of questions, one more question remains unresolved.

If knowing a question is not a part of religious compulsions, and is merely recommended or beneficial or bears scientific significance only, then not being aware of its answer will not harm the fundamental beliefs of a person. Therefore, in most of the religious questions, it should be borne in mind that at the very first step, the questions should be separated from the doubts.

Now, let us analyze whether longevity is a question or a doubt. Initially, we shall treat this query as a doubt that has been raised in various ways, the gist of which is as follows:

Firstly, man is like a car. After a car has been used for a certain period of time, it wears out. It is not possible that a car is used constantly and its condition does not deteriorate. On account of incessant utility, the nuts and bolts of the human body are subject to wear and tear. It's not necessary that it should work in excess. If he just continues to live, nourishes, has internal physical activity, and the cells of his body are busy and active, these will ensure the antiquity of the body cells. So, in this doubt, man is likened to a car, which deteriorates on utility, followed by antiquity and extinction.

Another example of the skepticism pertinent to longevity is that every kind of existent has a particular age limit, after which, it becomes old and expires. A mosquito lives for a maximum of five weeks but a lion continues to live for fifty years. An orange tree has a specific age, while a banyan tree has its own age limit. Similarly, the lifespan of the human species is 80-90 years and at the most, he may live for a hundred and fifty odd years. But more than this duration would be against the normal course of human life.

Another doubt that is connected to the aforementioned objection is the hereditary effect in human age. For instance, if we scrutinize the age of the members of a family, we will observe that if the ancestors of that family lived for an approximate duration of 50-60 years, then in all probability, the normal age of their descendants too will be the same. Thus, when we analyze the ages of the ancestors of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), we observe that all of them lived for a period of maximum 50-60 years and the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), despite all his greatness, lived for not more than a precise 63 years. Therefore, under the aforementioned law, the age of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) must not exceed that of his ancestors.

Another point raised is that even if we accept the longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), the concept of him remaining young despite the years, creates even more doubts and is not at all in accordance with scientific standards. For, in any case, the cells of the human body get antiquated and definitely affect the appearance of face, teeth, skin, hair, etc. So, on what basis can we accept the youth of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) with longevity?

Moreover, a few Quranic verses are used in support of these criticisms, one of which is the oft-quoted one,

« كلّ نفسٍ ذائقه الموت ».

"Every soul has to taste death[66]."

Then how can one claim that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) does not die? Another cited verse is,

« إنّك ميت و انّهم ميتون ».

"(O Prophet!) Surely you will die and surely they will die[67]."

Yet another verse relied upon is,

« و من نعمره نُنكّسه في الخلق ».

"And whosoever We give long life, We render him miserable in creation.[68]"

[66] Surah Aale Imran (3): 185

[67] Surah Zumar (39): 30

Allah the Almighty relates this judgment as a law and a tradition. Then how can it be said that a person, who has already lived for more than a thousand years and might probably live for another couple of thousand years more, will remain young in appearance and will have no signs of old age?!!

All these are doubts that are raised by relying on Quranic verses. Of course, there are other doubts as well but their sources are these very objections that we have mentioned. Finally, anybody can raise these objections with minor modifications.

Now, in reply to these objections, let us first analyze the premise. In other words, let us answer these queries from various viewpoints. Initially, we shall discuss longevity from the philosophical angle. Thereafter, we will debate it from the scientific aspect and evaluate it in the light of natural sciences. Finally, we will respond to the Quranic verses relied upon in support of these criticisms and cite some other verses that support longevity. Therefore, we will resolve this issue (of longevity) in three ways: Philosophy, physical science (in general) and Quran.

1. Longevity: A Philosophical Perspective

According to philosophy, every thing has a cause. Thus, nothing can come into existence without cause occurs. And anything that comes into existence, for it to become non-existent, another cause is required. So, just as it is essential that for every existent there should be a cause, it is also necessary that for its non-existence, there must be some reason. For, if there is no cause, the first cause (of existence) will provide continuity to its effect. Therefore, whatever exists is due to a cause and whatever ceases to occur is again because of some reason. If we have proof for the existence, we must have proof to establish that it no longer exists; otherwise, we must believe in the perpetuity of its existence.

Based on this principle of logic, Islamic jurisprudence has a law named "*Isteshaab*". If I have placed this card on the

[68] Surah Yaasin (36): 68

table and have a proof that I have done this work, then if I want to say that the card is not on the table, I must furnish evidence in support of my claim. Of course, to prove that the card is not on the table is the responsibility of the one who makes such a claim and not me, who believes that the card is on the table.

No doubt, *"Evidence is the responsibility of the claimant while oath is for the one who denies*" is a well-established principle of jurisprudence. But if the claimant has brought the proof for the existence of the thing that he claims exists, then it is for the opponent to provide evidence for its non-existence because it is a new claim and not just denial. If it is established that 'A' lives, then the one who claims that he is dead, must bring some proof for his claim, otherwise it will be assumed that A continues to live.

Let us cite an instance for better understanding of the issue. Suppose, one day we plant fifty trees on the road. The first day when we see these fifty trees, the question that crops up in our minds: Till when will these fifty trees continue to live? Immediately, we will remember this law and say to ourselves that till the time it is necessary for them to survive, they will continue to do so provided no obstacles or impediments come in the way of their lives. But after ten days, when we see that five of these trees are missing, the query that comes in the mind as to why are these five trees missing? We don't ask ourselves as to why are the remaining forty-five trees still surviving. We search for answers for the former question and come to know that these five trees are missing because they dried up or were cut down, or they were not watered properly, or some children have uprooted it, and so on and so forth.

The same law applies for animals and for humans. For example, in a maternity home, fifty infants are born. On seeing them, the question that arises in our minds is that how long will they continue to live? In reply to this question, we shall say that if the demand of their lives are provided for and the obstacles done away with, then they shall continue to live and we have no proof for their non-existence because they have already come into existence. After ten days, two infants die. Now the question will be asked as to why these two failed to survive? It is due to this

law of continuity of existence that whenever we hear of somebody's death, we ask for the reasons for his death and never question a person that why is he continuing to live?

2. **Longevity: A Scientific Perspective**

From the scientific aspect, the statement that man is like a car is baseless because man is **not** a car. For, the day it comes out of the factory, a car is subject to deterioration and wear and tear. But man, from the first day of his birth, constantly craves for perfection. Body cells are not like nuts and bolts or like parts of machine. In the human body, the process of renewal and discarding of the old cells is a never-ending process till they attain a certain degree of perfection.

Hence, to strike a similarity between a newborn child on par with a just-produced factory car is absurd because on the whole, a living being differs vastly from a car. You may recite a thousand elegies in front of a car and yet it will not budge. But if you inflict just a single spiritual tragedy on man, it will reduce his age to half. Similarly, it does not make any difference to a car whether it is being used for carrying a bride to her groom's home or is being used as a hearse. But it does matter to man as to how he is being used. Thus, from both material and spiritual aspects, man varies vastly from stones as well as vegetation.

As for the hereditary factor in longevity it can be said: firstly from the scientific aspect hereditary has not been established in longevity. Secondly in numerous hereditary factors some are seen in the next generation while others are not. Moreover, the hereditary factor is propounded just as a probability and it is not that all the characteristics of an individual are transferred or transmitted to the next generation, leave alone to all his descendants. Therefore, even if we assume the proof of hereditary as true for the sake of argument yet under this rule, we cannot claim that all the sons are exactly identical in age to their father. As we see that there have been people who enjoyed long lives but their sons were either still born or die at a very young age. Also there have been people who died in the prime of their youth but their sons enjoyed extremely long lives.

Without prejudice to whatever we have discussed, even if we assume that longevity is hereditary, it will apply only for natural lives. But if in a family, all the ancestors have been poisoned or killed, we cannot submit that the short lives of the ancestors will affect their eleventh generation descendant (particularly where ***all*** have been either poisoned or killed). Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) belongs to that family where all his forefathers, till Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) have been martyred and did not die their natural deaths. Thus, even if accept the argument of legacy, it will not be applicable for this particular family.

As for establishing longevity, numerous anthropologists have presented and jotted down their investigations. Among the best books on the subject is that of Dr. Paaknejaad and I advise all of you to go through it. Its title is "*Awwalleen Daanishgaah wa Aakhareen Peyaambar*" (The First University and the Last Prophet). In the second or third volume, he discusses longevity and mentions the views of various scientists on the subject.

The anthropologists mentioned in this book opine that man is like an existent whose structure is such that if all his requirements are provided for and external factors are kept at bay, he will continue to live for an indefinite period. A comparison will facilitate the understanding of the discussion. Let's say, a watermelon that is kept in the open will become rotten in a week or a month even if none touches it. But this card is unlike the watermelon. For, if this card is kept here for years together and none touches it, it will remain unaffected. This is because the atoms of the watermelon are perishable while those of the cards are not.

Regarding man, the anthropologists suggest that human cells contain inherent potential perpetuity. Now, let me cite a quote from the book "Man: The Unknown" by Dr. Alexis Carrel. I have read this book during my days as a student. Regardless of the author being from the East or the West, we must admit that it is a masterpiece from the scientific aspect. It provides a profound insight into the human being while discussing about human cognition and inter-human spiritual relations.

While submitting his investigations, Dr. Carrel writes that if the human cells are protected in the desired manner, he

can continue to live infinitely. It can also be said that he will not die and remain young forever[69].

Anyhow, we don't intend to get involved into the debate vis-à-vis the mode or means of longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Rather, we just want to answer the objection raised by some that according to modern science, longevity is impossible. We refute this objection by saying that as per the anthropologists, it is very much possible for man to live a long life. If you talk about hereditary, we state that the hereditary factor has not been established in determining the human lifespan. Even if we assume heredity as a factor in longevity, it will not apply in the case of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). If you argue that everything in the universe is perishable, we deny the contention, as this is not the general principle of nature. Thus, the objection raised is refuted at the outset.

We observe human interference in this very nature and witness that he manages to reduce as well as increase the lifespan of other existents. He plucks a flower from a plant to decorate his vase. Had he not plucked it, the flower would have continued to live for a few more days or weeks. This proves that man has an effective role to play in mostly increasing or sometimes reducing the life of other creatures. Like a gardener, through various procedures of Bonsai, protects a flower from being affected by extreme weather conditions like summer and winter, thereby increasing its life to a considerable duration. Similarly, man strives to augment the lifespan of animals and other human beings as well.

If man can augment or reduce lifespan, it shows that some kind of a method or procedure is involved in the same. Now, this procedure involves either direct interference in the nature of the existent or to enhance the characteristics that will help it in prolongation of its life. For example, some stimulant or booster is added to its diet that helps increase its age.

Nowadays, scientific researches are debating furiously the ways and means of increasing the average age of mankind.

[69] Man, the Unknown, p. 173 (Persian). Interested readers can refer to the original English version.

All efforts of medical science are in the direction of augmenting the standard age of humanity and they have indeed succeeded to a certain extent. For example, if previously the mean age of humanity was 25-30, now it has gone up to 35-40. Scientists and doctors have focused their efforts in preventing man from dying. In other words, their researches are directed to explore the secret of survival, longevity and youth of mankind.

Before proceeding with the discussion on Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), let us make a general query: Is there or not a nutrient, herb or medicine available in nature, which on being used, will increase a person's life? Does there exist a scientific possibility or not? We ask the scientists: Do you consider it scientifically possible or do you deem it to be impossible? In other words, is it possible that a man, facing all psychological pressures that the society inflicts on him and the spiritual stress that he encounters, benefits from such a nutrient, which will enhance his lifespan and increase his age? They will certainly reply in the positive. Why? For, only he can answer in the negative, who has researched and investigated each and every existent in nature. Therefore, when we have not done so, how can we make such a claim that there is no such medicine or nutrient at all?

Now let us come and evaluate the standard of investigations. Is there not a chance that among the herbs there is a flower or plant that can enhance human life? Is it possible or not? How many of the total plants and herbs existent in the universe you have studied and researched? Can they reply that we have researched all the herbs and plants existent in the universe? How many of the herbs present in the jungles and deserts have reached to the physical laboratories of the world?

We say that we have stated about the herbs, now let us talk about the animals. Is it possible that the flesh of an animal possesses the ability to increase the longevity of mankind? Or perhaps, the flesh of some beast bears this particularity? The sheep that you eat everyday, have you completely researched and studied about its bones, veins, joints, etc. and are you sure that there are no signs of longevity available in it? If you are not fully aware about one sheep,

then what about the entire animal kingdom! Also, animal kingdom ranges from the beasts of the land to the sea creatures.

Even if we assume that all herbs, fruits or animals are researched thoroughly and it is found that there is no sign of longevity in them, yet the same cannot be said when two plants, two vegetables, two herbs, etc. are cross-fertilized and other similar permutations and combinations. For example, if we say that the watermelon does not possess the trait of longevity in it, for that matter the cucumber too does not contain this particularity. But then, what about the product that is the result of grafting of a watermelon and a cucumber? It's here that an entire ocean of ignorance unfolds before man.

Consequently, to answer the aforementioned question in the negative is beyond the realm of science. Science can never reply the query of longevity in the negative. To conclude the discussion, we submit that never can a congregation of scientists declare that it is impossible for a human being to live beyond a certain age. Therefore, we ask the skeptics of longevity, 'Are your discussions scientific or based on ignorance?' If it is scientific, you should know that a scientist could never declare longevity as impossible. And if your discussions are based on ignorance, then we have no arguments with the ignorant and you too kindly take off your scholarly guise.

3. Longevity in Quran

Now let us proceed to have a Quranic analysis (with regards to longevity). Firstly, let us evaluate the verses. One such verse is

« كلّ نفسٍ ذائقه الموت ».

"Every soul will taste death." Of course, none denies this fact. But, the limit (of age) for death has not been defined. We cannot claim at this moment that so and so has died. If asked why? We answer that because Quran says that every soul will taste death.

Another verse declares,

« إنّك ميت و انّهم ميتون ».

"*Surely you will die and they will die.*" When this verse was revealed on the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), did he (s.a.w.a.) die

instantly? Like the previous verse, this one too does not fix the time of death and hence cannot be used for the above purpose.

As for the third verse that declares,

« و من نعمره نُنكّسه في الخلق ».

"*And whosoever We give long life, We render him miserable in creation*", has stated the matter very explicitly. To elaborate a little, sometimes when we initiate the cause, the effect is bound to follow and it is not possible for us to prevent the effect. For example, any glass that I strike with a stone breaks. But I don't say that I strike the glass with a stone and I break the glass. Why? Because striking the glass with a stone and its breaking is one and the same thing.

In logic, sometimes the relation between the subject and the predicate is that of a cause and effect. At other times, both are related to one object and neither is the subject of the other. In the former instance, when the relation is of cause and effect, when the cause is brought into existence, the effect occurs automatically. Like we said, when we strike the glass with a stone, the glass breaks automatically. But the same does not apply to the statement: I will give watermelons to all the guests whom I invite. In other words, it is possible that I invite some guests but don't offer watermelons to them. It is in my hands whether to give them watermelons or not. Invitation of guests and offering them watermelons are not one and the same thing. Choice lies with the hosts, whether to offer the watermelons to the guests or not.

Similarly, when the Holy Quran declares, "*And whosoever We give long life, We render him miserable in creation*", it does not mean that whosoever We give long life, We ***have to*** render him abject in creation. No, this verse does not relate this law. Rather, it explains a general law of creation that whosoever lives a long life, will become abject in state. But those possibilities are in the hands of Allah. If He wants, He can render his condition pitiable or else, He can also allow him to remain young and handsome despite longevity.

Thus, the terms of Quran are such that both the possibilities are mentioned and both of them are related to divine intention. First, He explains the general law that whosoever He increases his lifespan, He will render him abject in state. Now, we ask humbly, O Allah! If You want to give somebody a long life and prevent his condition from being pitiable, can You not do so?

He, the Almighty, will retort angrily, ‘Of course! I can. The choice lies with Me (because I have power over all things).
Therefore, nowhere does the aforementioned Quranic verse create any doubt whatsoever. For, Allah’s *sunnah* is such that He can provide exceptions for any rule that He makes. For example, the *sunnah* of Allah is that He brings a person into existence after copulation of man with a woman and the necessary processes that follow. But in one instance, Allah the Almighty, willed to create Hazrat Eesa (a.s.) without a father. There are plenty of such exceptions.

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After replying to the verses that are cited as evidences against longevity, now let us proceed to establish longevity from the Quranic verses itself.
The first clear proof from the Quran is about the longevity of Hazrat Nuh (a.s.). The Holy Quran informs,

« و لقد ارسلنا نُوحاً إلي قومِهِ فلبث فيهم الف سنه إلّا خمسين عاما فاخذهم الطوفانْ و هْم ظالمون ».

“***And indeed We sent Nuh to his nation, then he stayed with them for a thousand save fifty years. Later, the deluge overtook them while they were unjust***.[70]”

Obviously, Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) did survive for quite a few years even after the deluge. This is an absolutely clear verse of Quran that does not call for esoteric interpretation nor is it an ambiguous verse.
Likewise, in the Majestic Quran, there are various instances when Allah the Almighty has displayed His Power and granted long lives to some of His creatures. Here, we shall mention one such verse for the benefit of our readers. In the story of Hazrat Ozair (a.s.) [or Irmiya (a.s.) according to some interpreters as the name is not mentioned in the Quran] it has come down as follows:
« أو كالّذي مرٌّ علي قريهٍ و هي خاويهّ علي عرْوْشها قال أنّي يحيي هذه اللّهْ بعد موتها فأماتهْ اللّهْ مائه عامٍ ثمٌّ بعثه قال كم لبثت قال لبثت يوماً أو بعض يومٍ قال

[70] Surah Ankaboot: 14

بل لبثت مائه عام فانظر إلي طعامك و شرابك لم يتسنّه و انظر الي حمارك و لنجعلك آيه للناس و انظر الي العظام كيف ننشزها ثم نكسوها لحما فلما تبين له قال أعلم أن اللّه علي كلِّ شي ءٍ قدير ».
“***Or the like of whom (Ozair) who passed by a town and it had fallen down on its roofs. He said, ‘When will Allah give it life after its death?’ So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years, then raised him to life. He said, ‘How long have you tarried?’ He said, ‘I have tarried a day or a part of a day.’ Said He, “Nay! You have tarried a hundred years, then look at your food and drink- years have not passed over it and look at your ass, and that We may make you a sign to man and look at the bones, how We set them together, then clothed them with flesh, so when it became clear to him, he said, ‘I know that Allah has power over all things.***[71]”

The story goes like this: Ozair (a.s.) was passing by a village. He passed by the village graveyard wherein graves were piled upon one another and had thrown out the bones and skeletons of the corpses. He looked at one of the bones that had turned powdery and thought, ‘How can Allah grant it life again?’ It was noon then and Prophet Ozair (a.s.), who was 25 years old, was sitting under a tree and had tied his ass to a tree. He had just spread his dining cloth to have his lunch. His meal comprised of a cup of milk, fig and a loaf of bread. He was busy eating when suddenly he spotted the bones and he mused, ‘How can Allah resurrect it?’
Quran informs that at that very moment Allah captured his soul and he remained in this condition (of death), when Allah resurrected him and asked, “How long have you stayed over here?’ He (Ozair) replied, ‘Perhaps a day or part of a day.’ Allah the Almighty retorted, ‘No! You are here for a hundred years! For a century, Ozair (a.s.) was lying in the graveyard, under the scorching sun, floods of water flowed over him, chilly winter enveloped him, days and nights passed through him, yet he neither turned dust nor powder. He remained totally safe, sound and untouched. His food too was safe and therefore, the Holy Quran ordered, ‘Look at your food and drink, years have not affected them.’ Man himself, (Allah’s creature) with his limited

[71] Surah Baqarah: 259

power, produces a refrigerator that has the ability to retain the freshness of meat for such a time that it can be exported from one country to another for consumption. Does Allah the Almighty does not the power to protect food and drink for a particular duration in similar circumstances? Thereafter, Allah the Almighty says, 'Look at your ass. It has died and become dust. But We will resurrect it and clothe it with flesh.'

Ozair (a.s.) observed a sudden tumult in the earth, the bones of the ass were gathered and within a fraction of a second, the ass regained life. Then Allah the Almighty ordered, 'Now, mount it and continue with your journeys to cities and towns.' Ozair (a.s.) mounted it and arrived in his city but to his utter amazement, it had undergone a complete change. Its streets and areas had transformed to an unrecognizable extent.

Finally, with extreme difficulty, he managed to locate his residence and saw an old man with a flowing white beard residing in it. The old man asked, 'Who are you?' Ozair (a.s.) responded, 'I am Ozair'. Not believing the response, the old man retorted, 'Don't talk rubbish. Ozair left this place more than a hundred years ago, never to return again.[72]'

This incident is about two Ozairs (a.s.). One, who lived for 150 years and another who lived for 50 years. That is, Ozair (a.s.), separated from his brother at the age of 25 and died. He regained life after a hundred years and again lives with his brother for another 25 years, dying at the age of fifty.

This incident is narrated in the Old Testament and other heavenly books. The Holy Quran has also mentioned it in the 259th verse of Surah Baqarah and there is no vagueness or ambiguity whatsoever in it for it to be interpreted or explained in any other way. There are many such instances in the Holy Quran wherein Allah the Almighty has manifested His power for the people.

Here, we don't want to claim right at the outset that the long life of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is in Allah's power. For, our aim is to first establish the possibility of the subject and once that is done, we shall show that it is in the hands of Allah to do the same. Because, impossibilities are of two types: One that is beyond the realm of intellect (*mahaal-e-aqli*) and second that is usually impossible (*mahaal-e-aadi*) (as is not observed

[72] Behaar al-Anwaar, vol. 14, p. 360-362; vol. 46, p. 310

commonly). Intellectually impossible is that about which the intellect decrees it to be impossible in occurrence. Normally impossibility is that about which the intellect does not judge that it's impossible but has not occurred yet.

All scientific inventions are of the second category like human forays into space, invention of the airplane, conception of numerous life-saving drugs, solutions of various medical problems, etc. For instance, till recently, man has been unable to find a remedy for AIDS but the possibility of an antidote cannot be ruled out.

Intellectually impossible is that about which the intellect has a firm judgment that it is impossible for it to occur. Now, longevity is beyond the domain of both the impossibilities. In the first instance, we observed that intellect does not regard long life for humans to be impossible as there can be no scientific explanation that can deem it impossible. Thereafter, we also established that it is also not normally impossible because numerous examples of people living long lives[73] have been seen and science too does not negate the possibility.

Therefore, Quran, science, philosophy and history establish the belief in the longevity of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). It is neither an impossibility nor in contrast with science, Islam, Quran and traditions.

[73] A few years ago, the renowned magazine "Reader's Digest", which is circulated globally in various languages, carried an article captioned, "Death Fears Us". It discussed about the people of Azerbaijan in erstwhile Russia, where the normal lifespan of people was in the range of 120-150 years. They were also involved in day-to-day activities of their lives. This was a common sight amongst them and none stared at them with amazement. Likewise, historical references provide us documents about people who enjoyed long lives. Exclusive books and special chapters have been devoted to the subject wherein the ages of Hazrat Adam (a.s.) (930), Hazrat Shoaib (a.s.) (912), Hazrat Lut (a.s.) (732), Hazrat Idris (a.s.) (300), Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) (950+), etc. have been mentioned. (Ref: Aaftaab-e-Subh-e-Ummeed, p. 83, 84).

The Philosophy of Occultation (*ghaibah*)

The philosophy of occultation is one of the fundamental discussions. That is, among the seventeen or eighteen discussions regarding Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), the philosophy of occultation is among the most sensitive. Some of these questions are as follows:

- 'Why has Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) gone into concealment?'
- 'Why occultation was not for other Imams (a.s.) as well?'
- 'Why Allah did not place the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) in hiding to achieve the same goal destined for His last Hujjat (a.t.f.s.)?'
- 'Why Allah has not hidden Ameerul Momineen (a.s.)?' 'Basically, what is the need for occultation?'
- 'Was it not possible for Allah that when the conditions of reappearance were provided for, to raise a person, who would take all those steps that are supposed to be taken by Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) and establish universal justice on the earth?'

These questions are occasionally put across as objections and at times, are asked with the intention of poking fun at the concept of occultation. The opponents contend that, 'This mode of putting in occultation of a man and making him reappear after a thousand years implies that Allah is unable to train a man and hence, He has kept him concealed for this day. What was the harm if the twelfth Imam, like the previous Imams, would perform all the tasks assigned unto him and like his ancestors

was killed through poison or sword? Whenever Allah willed, He could have got His work done. Just as He had sent the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) at an appropriate time, He could have dispatched an individual to realize His aim at an opportune moment. As Allah did not send Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) in occultation for the necessity of the arrival of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), in this instance too, there was no need to conceal Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.). As and when the need arose, He could have sent a man to achieve the desired objective.

* * *

In reply to the question, 'why Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) has gone into occultation?' traditions have furnished various types of answers. Here, we shall present the numerous reasons that have been cited and then try to establish a relationship between them and draw some conclusion.

We find in traditions that the infallible Imams (a.s.) were questioned as to why Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) went into hiding? They (a.s.) replied, "*He feared being killed*.[74]" In some traditions, Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.) '*Pointed towards his stomach'*, thereby suggesting apprehension of murder[75]. Therefore, one group of traditions has established that Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) went into occultation to avoid being killed.

Another group of traditions has considered occultation as a mode of examination of Shias. Why did Imam (a.s.) go into occultation? *Because Allah the Almighty intended to test the Shias during occultation*[76]. Of course, more traditions talk about apprehension of being killed. Yet, some other traditions are of the view that *Allah alone knows the real reason and we are unaware of it*[77].

Most of the scholars have relied on the last mentioned reply that only Allah knows the real reason of this affair and that we are totally uninformed about it. They also bring instances to prove their point as to how on occasions Allah Himself or His appointees have performed some tasks whose rationale were

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[74] Al-Ghaibah of No'mani, Chapter 10, p. 176
[75] Ibid. pp. 176, 177
[76] Ibid. pp. 201-211
[77] Muntakhab al-Asar by Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 266

unknown to anybody. For example, they cite the story of Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) and Hazrat Khizr (a.s.). The latter did some things, while the former was unaware of their logic. He objected to Hazrat Khizr (a.s.) but was told of the reasons much later. This group is of the view that after the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.), people will know the real rationale behind occultation.

Therefore, as few reasons have been cited, let us gather them and reach to the core of the discussion. That is, let us examine the various rationales given in the traditions and on further intensive research and investigation, hope to understand the philosophy of occultation with the help of these traditions.

* * *

To understand this concept, it is necessary to analyze a few topics and clarify them. Firstly, it is not necessary that Allah should guide everybody forcibly. For, mankind has been created in a way that he should strive to achieve perfection voluntarily and attain the status of a complete worshipper.

For Allah, creating a perfect man is very much possible, but of course, through coercion. But if He has decreed that man must acquire this position on his own volition and accord, then the onus is on him.

In other words, divine grace is conferred on one and all. But how each individual realizes this potential is dependent on him and related to his freedom. It does not imply, by any means, that Allah the Almighty is unable to create a perfect and complete man, rather, it suggests that it is the intention of Allah that man should attain this level on his own accord.

Sometimes, Allah gives two different individuals exceptional talent but while one of them uses it aptly, the other misuses and abuses it in an undesirable manner. For example, the talent that Allah confers on Allamah Hilli (a.r.) is the same that is endowed on Hitler. The geniality that is given to Shaikh Murtuza Ansari (a.r.) is also granted to the other criminals of history like Chengiz Khan. This is the first geniality, potential and perfection that are given to all the aforementioned individuals. But, while Shaikh Murtuza Ansari (a.r.) realizes his potential in the way of Allah and comes to be know as the great Shaikh Ansari (a.r.), Chengiz Khan uses this talent in the way of murder and killings and gains notoriety as Chengiz. Therefore, the light of grace is

conferred on both kinds of people, but one type of them does not use it in the desirable manner.

The grace of guidance of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), in his capacity as Prophet, shines on all companions but they are not the same (in aptitude). On his own volition, one amongst them turns away from truth, does not accept guidance and turns criminal. On the other hand, another benefits from this leadership, becomes righteous and attains lofty levels.

Hence, it was Allah's wish that man should gain perfection on his own volition and this applies to man as an individual as well as to the human society. Mankind, on a singular basis, receives potential from divinity, but everybody does not realize the promise equally. Only a few achieve success in fulfilling the promise. As Allah the Omniscient knew in advance that only these selected few will strive to realize their potential to the fullest and not squander it away due to their freewill, He appoints them to the status of Prophethood or Imamate. If Allah knew, on account of His pre-knowledge, that of all these people who will realize their potential positively, only one will use it to the maximum and take it to unparalleled heights and others will not be able to match him, although they could, He will appoint this sole individual to this great position and protect him for the same.

It is asked: Why did Allah preserve him? Could He not create another individual?

We state: Of course, Allah could very much create another individual with all the desired qualities and characteristics. But this creation would be a creation by coercion and not the one who had acquired all perfection through his volition and freewill. Therefore, in reply, we submit: Allah the Almighty did not preserve Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) at the time because He knew that after Ibrahim (a.s.), there was another mortal, who would benefit from God-given potential and ability voluntarily and become Moosa (a.s.). Hence, the need to preserve Ibrahim (a.s.) was not called for. The same logic applied for the non-preservation of Moosa (a.s.) and Eesa (a.s.). For, Allah knew that after these two Prophets (a.s.), there was yet another human viz. Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.a.), who would utilize his potential positively to the maximum possible limits and attain the status of a complete worshipper.

Similarly, in not conserving the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), Allah knew that he (s.a.w.a.) would be succeeded by Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), followed by the eleven Imams (a.s.) from his progeny.
So why did Allah the Almighty preserve Hazrat Baqiyatullah (a.t.f.s.) and safeguard him? This is because He knew that had He granted me all the endowed and acquired perfection, I could not become the remnant of Allah voluntarily. Why? He knew that I have the volition and would squander away the talent conferred on me. In a single moment, in which Hazrat Baqiyatullah (a.t.f.s.) acquires perfection voluntarily, I would not remain even within the confines of piety.
It should be known that Allah the Almighty had conferred huge potential on Iblis as well. So, why did he not realize this talent and instead rose in rebellion against his Creator? The answer lies in volition. He did it on his own freewill. For, the actual meaning of volition and freewill is that its onus cannot be laid on anybody else and the buck ends at the person possessing the freewill. This discussion is applicable to all creation. Therefore, if it is decreed that man should reach perfection on his own volition, Allah the Almighty knows that none will reach this esteemed status with success save the son of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). Hence, He confers him with all these perfect attributes and preserves him for the great mission.
This is one view that it is decreed for man to achieve perfection on his own accord. On a social level too, the same applies, as Allah declares,

« و لو شاء ربّك لآمن من في الارض كلُّهم جميعا ».

"*Had your Lord willed, indeed everyone who is on the earth would have believed.*[78]"

Thus, as this world is one of volition and the universe follows the pattern of freewill, the human society moves on its own freewill and accord. That is, all discussions pertaining to historical determinism and the future perfect of humanity, particularly in the gatherings of plagiarists and gleaners, are incorrect. For, if man is decreed to be free, there can be no reason of coercion for the perfection of humanity except that we prophesy that as man is free and wise, he should improve in the

[78] Surah Yunus (10): 99

future. Although, this prediction itself is not a definite law yet it can be applicable to a certain extent.
Let us presume that there is a very brilliant student. But can we say for sure, that he will turn out to be a doctor, an engineer, or a religious scholar? Certainly, there is no such law but we can just make a rough prediction as he is free, wise and a dutiful child, he will study well. This forecast is merely circumstantial.
Verily, humanity should acquire perfection in knowledge and science. But it cannot be said with utmost certainty that it ***will*** because there is no proof for it. Allah the Almighty informs about one reality of humanity but not law. For, the statement '*the future of the world will be perfect*' is a law. Sometimes, we forecast the future but it is not a law. For example, '*a stone that is thrown up will come down*' is a scientific law. But to say that the host will certainly serve us tea is a prediction about an eventuality based on the host's volition, not coercion.
Now, it is decreed that the future of humanity will be better, voluntarily because this world is one of free will. That is, both the leaders as well as the societies are free. The leader makes himself perfect on account of his freewill and enters the society.
We would like to explain two levels of humanity and society vis-à-vis volition: One is the level of conveyance of laws (*iblaagh*) and second is their implementation (*ijraa*).
The stage of conveyance commenced with the raising of the first prophet, Hazrat Adam (a.s.). It is resolved that man attains the position of '*khalifatullah'* and for rendering this position common, Allah conveys to one individual and commands him to implement these laws in himself. Thereafter, Allah orders him to convey the message to the people and as their leader, supervise its implementation. For, on an individual level, they have to implement themselves but on a social plane, they require a leader having an upper hand over their actions.
Consequently, Allah the Almighty conveys His religion to Hazrat Adam (a.s.), who puts these laws into practice on a personal level. But Allah's conveyance to Adam (a.s.) and his execution do not belong to a very high level. In other words, it does not befit Adam (a.s.) to commit *Tark-e-Awla* despite possessing inherent infallibility. His knowledge too is not on par with that of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.). Yet, Allah conveys His laws to Adam (a.s.), who implements the same in his person and has reached to the position of '*khalifatullah'*. But when Adam (a.s.)

ventures out to convey to the people, he encounters difficulties. That is, none heeds his admonishments. Those who do hear his advices don't put them into practice.
Generally, from Adam (a.s.) to Nuh (a.s.), conveyance was incomplete and was confined to a few principles of monotheism but religion, as a constitution, was not communicated. Why? Because the people were not accepting. Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) actively propagated religion to the people for more than nine hundred and fifty years but failed to complete his mission. For, whenever he intended to complete his *shariah*, the people did not accept. As for the practice aspect, the lesser said the better.
Well, in such conditions, couldn't Allah implement His laws forcibly? No because the custom of Allah is not based on coercion. And had force and compulsion been the norm, there was no need for all these difficulties either. He could have set things right merely by an intention. But He has neither desired nor decreed this mode. Of course, Allah assists, supports and prepares the premises for the actions but when the actual moment of action arrives, it is the volition of man that has the final say. Possibly, Allah provides 99 % of the premises but the moment man intends to select the action, Allah does not push him forward. For, if Allah pushes him forward, compulsion enters the scene. Now, perhaps for this 1 %, man trips and does not perform the deed.
Therefore, it was not decided that Allah should have angels in the earth as He has plenty of them. Nor was it decided that He should have animals as donkeys abound. Rather, the decision was to have a wise, intelligent and free man and hence the entire discussion revolves around humans and their freedom and independence.
So, we revert to history and ask, "O so and so! Why did you not heed to Nuh's (a.s.) advice?" Inevitably, we curse them just as Nuh (a.s.) had cursed them in his time. We proceed forward and question, "O unjust ones! Why did you not pay attention to Ibrahim's (a.s.) admonishments?" And proceed to deem them to be evil and deviated.
Here, some people step forward and search for excuses on behalf of Namrud and his followers. They opine, "They did not possess perfect and complete intelligence and wisdom." This view is absolutely wrong because had this been the case, then why would we curse them? If there wisdom was not yet

perfected, as you suggest, and their phase had not yet arrived in the tunnel of historical determinism, then to provide for them a universal constitution is invalid and inappropriate while we firmly believe that Ibrahim's (a.s.) Shariah was indeed general and worldwide. Therefore, the pretext of their intelligence and wisdom being incomplete and imperfect does not hold water.
It should be borne in mind that basically, we don't have any proof to claim that generally, today's man is superior in intelligence, wisdom and understanding than his counterpart was a thousand years earlier. This idea too belongs to the school of plagiarism in their effort to prove evolution in human understanding. They have inculcated this thought in our minds that today's man holds superior powers of comprehension than the humans of a millennium earlier.
Of course, we accept that experimental science has advanced and generally, science has progressed in some aspects but this development cannot be generalized for all nations and humans. We don't have any proof to substantiate our claim that the Englishman of today is superior in intelligence and understanding than the Englishman of say, the eighteenth century. On the contrary, sociologists are unanimous in their view that in this last century, the British have had a steady decline. Moreover, there are quite a few nations, who while climbing the development staircase, suddenly came tumbling down to a reckless fall. Was Iran more progressive during the Qaajaar dynasty or in the Safavide rule? Certainly, Iran was much better in the Safavide era in knowledge, science, philosophy, arts, construction, social security and religiousness than it was during the Qaajaar reign.
Therefore, the Prophets (a.s.) arrived to convey the message but encountered difficulties in the same. Occasionally, they did manage to gain some amount of triumph in their aim. Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) was certainly more successful in his mission of conveyance than his ancestor, Hazrat Nuh (a.s.). The reason for his success was two-fold: One, Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) certainly strove more and two, the willingness to accept was found more in his people.
Of course, it cannot be said that the nation of Ibrahim (a.s.) possessed more understanding and intelligence that that of Hazrat Nuh (a.s.) and hence, the former was more successful in his mission. No! Man is free and independent and on the basis

of this very freedom, he accepted the call of Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.). Is it not possible that in a second, man decides to reform himself and change the course of history? Such instances abound in history when individuals have changed its path. Hence, the acceptance of the nation of Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) to his call helped the generations that followed and pushed forward the premises for conveying the message to a certain extent.

Hazrat Moosa (a.s.), in his time, conveyed the message to the Bani Israel to the extent that its implementation was possible for him. Hence, he was the only Prophet who was successful in both the levels of his mission, conveyance as well as implementation to a certain extent and consequently, could give some shape to the concept called *Ummah*, a task in which Hazrat Ibrahim could not achieve much. It was precisely for this reason that Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) could provide salvation for his people from Egypt as they paid heed to his advices. But after they reached Mount Sinai, these very people who had reached to the state of implementation, suddenly made a volte-face, in a way that they even refuted his message. Not only they denied Hazrat Moosa's (a.s.) commandments, they even challenged his God and started worshipping the calf. This was a turn-around of the worst kind.

If perfection was forced, there was no possibility of turning back and if the journey towards perfection was a certainty and determined by history, surely the people of Israel would have never betrayed Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) and worshipped the calf. Thus, when Moosa (a.s.) returned from the Mount Tur, he had to start his mission all over again. All the tasks, right from the basics of purification to the narration of beliefs, commenced afresh and hence, the delay in implementation of the message. Although, it was decided earlier that Moosa (a.s.) would take the Bani Israel from the desert of Sinai to the Promised Land, he resisted from doing so. For, he observed that the mission has not yet been conveyed, thereby making the ultimate implementation and promulgation impossible. Therefore, he had no option but to keep the Bani Israel in the desert of Sinai for forty years.

During this time, Moosa (a.s.) departed from this world. Yusha Ibn Nun (a.s.), his successor, took upon himself the mantle of completing the mission of his predecessor. But the moment they

arrived in Palestine, the Israelites turned apostate again. Dawood (a.s.) succeeded Yusha (a.s.) and gained a semblance of success in both the levels of his mission, conveyance as well as implementation. He handed over his kingdom to his son, Sulaiman (a.s.), who formed an ideal form of divine government, albeit limited. It was during his reign that the entire Bani Israel had become monotheists and obeyed Allah's commands. In other words, most of them were Allah's caliphs on the earth.

Sulaiman's (a.s.) successors wished to propagate this message to the other parts of the globe but were trapped at the level of conveyance and propagation. Consequently, those who had moved from the stage of conveyance to that of implementation, once again turned their backs on Allah's religion and became apostates. Bani Israel were again on the road to decline and killing of Prophets became the order of the day. Things reached to a state that they killed Prophets within 24 hours, despite the fact that these (Bani Israel) were the very people who had attained the state of divine caliphate not very long ago.

History flips once again. Bakht al-Nasr, the tyrant emperor, invades and attacks Palestine. He turns it into ruins, rendering naught all the good works of the previous Prophets. As a result, the entire mission had to be started all over again. Now, Hazrat Eesa (a.s.) arrives on the scene and starts to convey the mission not on a global scale but only for the Bani Israel. Unfortunately, he fails in his efforts.

Finally, prophethood reaches to the seal of the Prophets, the Messenger of Islam, Muhammad Mustafa (s.a.w.a.). The secret of his success lies in the fact that he could convey the general principles worldwide. That is, he managed to do what Ibrahim (a.s.), Moosa (a.s.) and Eesa (a.s.) could not. Hence, he was successful in implementing the message to a nation, viz. the Arabs.

When the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) departed from this transient world, he had accomplished his mission of conveyance, a task in which the previous Prophets (a.s.) were unsuccessful. In other words, Moosa (a.s.) could not hand over to his brother Harun (a.s.) whatever was necessary for humanity. The reason for this being that we see that the successors of Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) were once again raised for Prophethood to renew their link with their Creator and to convey

His message to the people. But the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) completed the message with the appointment of Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.). Had he (s.a.w.a.) not done so, the conveyance of his message would have remained incomplete. Allah the Almighty commands in the Holy Quran,

« يا أيهاالرَّسولُ بلّغ ما اُنزل اليك من ربك و ان لم تفعل فما بلَّغت رسالته ».

"*O Messenger! Convey what has been sent down upon you from your Lord. And if you fail to do so, then as if you have not conveyed His message at all.*[79]"

Thus, with the appointment of Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) completed the conveyance and departed from this world. This explains the reason for the non-necessity of prophets and messengers after him (s.a.w.a.) because the primary duty of the Prophet is to convey the message, a task duly performed by the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.). The method of this conveyance was that he (s.a.w.a.) conveyed the general principles on a general level himself and on the special plane, he (s.a.w.a.) appointed Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.).

Ali (a.s.) came forward to convey as well as execute the mission of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.). Had he not encountered resistance and hostility and been allowed to further the mission of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), for say approximately ten years for conveyance and twenty years for execution and implementation, the scenario would have been completely different than what it is today. Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) himself says in this regard,

« اما واللّه لو ثُني لي الوساده لحكمت بين اهل التَّوراه بتوراتهم و بين اهل الانجيل بانجيلهم ».

"*By Allah! Had I been allowed (to do my job), I would have judged between the people of Torah with their Torah, with the people of Injeel with their Injeel.*[80]"

In another place, he (a.s.) mentions,

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[79] Surah Maaedah (5): 67

[80] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 40, pp. 136, 144

"*Had you permitted me and did not place obstacles in my path, I would have manifested the bounties of the earth and the skies, extricated the treasures of the mines and made the bounties of the heavens descend for you*."

In other words, I would have arranged this world in a proper and worthy manner for you. Unfortunately, they did not allow him to do so and placed all sorts of hurdles and hindrances in his path. Why did they do this? Were they not having any intelligence? No! They did have intelligence but it was accompanied with volition, which led them to their lust for power and consequent destruction of all. This matter is clearer in our times today when people, despite their knowledge and understanding, crave for power and social status, and in the process, don't hesitate to even murder their closest of friends and acquaintances.

How does man get so barbaric? It's quite natural and should not amaze one at all. The gist of the discussion is that Allah has not created man as angel and this should not be forgotten. Hence, it should also not be surprising as to why some of the senior companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) behaved in such a manner. When power became the focal point, dispute and differences were easily the order of the day. Coups, conspiracies, uprisings, etc. were common and finally, they even marched to the house of Hazrat Zahra (s.a.), the daughter of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.). All these happenings and occurrences are not at all surprising for us, particularly those who, in our times, are witnessing similar phenomena.

Thus, we observed instances that a Prophet conveys his mission statement but when he intends to execute the same, obstacles are placed in his path. They even go the extent of creating hurdles in the conveyance of the message itself and worse, distort the memorandum of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.). Hence, the wheel that was brought in motion by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), had its control been in the hands of Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.), things would have occurred as planned and desired. They not only prevented the progress of the wheel but also turned it backwards and consequently, "*All the people turned away (from Islam) except three*.[81]"

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[81] Ibid, vol. 28, pp. 238-239

The Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) had moved the caravan rapidly but they attacked it midway and plundered it. As a result, only three people remained on true Islam after him. They (enemies of Ali) became the biggest hurdles in the path of those who were moving towards the position of '*khalifatullahi*' and therefore, as per our traditions, they are responsible for the sins of the jinn and the men. This is precisely the case. For, all the efforts of the Prophets and Messengers had reached to the fruit bearing stage when these transgressors arrived on the scene and rendered everything naught. What a turnaround that during Moaviyah's rule, when he heard the *Azaan* (call for prayers) he remarked, "*What is this call that is repeated throughout the day? Abu Bakr came and went but his name is not mentioned in it. Umar and Usman too arrived and departed but their names are not cited. Then why is the name of Muhammad repeated so often in it via the call, "I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah? By Allah! I will bury this name forever*.[82]"

The conclusion of the talk is that the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) arrived and conveyed. Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) too came to complete the message and implement it. But both the conveyance as well its implementation was brought to a grinding halt. Thus, when the conveyance was stopped on a general level, then what would Ali (a.s.) do? Was it possible to implement without conveyance or completion of the message? It was here that Ali (a.s.) and Zahra (s.a.) stood up and decided to at least prevent the wheel from going backwards to the maximum possible extent.

Hazrat Zahra (s.a.) said to Ali (a.s.), "O Ali! Don't you intend to rise and demand your right?" It is worth mentioning that it was not the intention of Hazrat Zahra (s.a.) to procure the right of her husband for worldly benefits. Rather, she just spoke out the query of the people throughout history when they would ask that if Ali (a.s.) was right, why did he not rise and demand his due? Why did he just sit in his house and take things as it is? Incidentally, at that very moment, the voice of the *Azaan* was heard and Ali (a.s.) asked, "*O Zahra! Don't you desire that this voice (of Azaan) survives? At least, things are maintained to the level in which the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) had brought*

[82] Sharh Nahj al-Balagha, Ibn Abi al-Hadid al-Motazeli, vol. 5, p. 129

them. If you want them to remain up to this mark, then let the line be that I have drawn."

Thus, Ali (a.s.) and Zahra (s.a.) tried to preserve the message to the extent it was conveyed by the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and strove incessantly to prevent distortions from creeping in the Islamic Shariah to the best of their abilities. The Caliphate introduced innovations in religion almost by the day in the name of Islam and as a result, the infallible Imams (a.s.) had to wage a continuous battle against these innovations and distortions.

When his reign commenced, Yazid intended to reverse all those things that the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) had brought, to the period of *Jaahiliyyah*. This was a major step towards degeneration and destruction of Islam. Accordingly, Imam Husain (a.s.) realized that there was only one way to stop this effort to weaken and destroy Islam. That is, he had to revolt and be martyred in its way so that this attempt fails and Allah's religion survives. So, Imam Husain (a.s.) took the desired steps and protected the endeavours of all the Prophets, Messengers and successors from Adam (a.s.) till himself and became the heir of Adam (a.s.).

« السلام عليك يا وارث آدم صفوه اللّه ».

"*Peace be on you, O heir of Adam, the chosen one of Allah*."

Therefore, the reason behind Imam Husain's (a.s.) martyrdom was neither government nor divine love nor all the things discussed previously. Rather, he (a.s.) rose and sacrificed his life to protect Islam. His great sacrifice ensured that the message of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was not completely obliterated and Quran remained amongst the midst of the people.

Of course, besides Imam Husain (a.s.), Imam Sajjad (a.s.) and the prisoners of Karbala, Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.) also partook in this holy war. Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.) took due advantage from the martyrdom of Imam Husain (a.s.) and the mental state of the masses to convey the message. That is, whatever the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) had conveyed but had not reached to Mecca from Medina, they propagated it throughout the Islamic world. They disseminated

matters related to Quranic sciences, divine verses and Islamic laws throughout the Islamic sphere.
Hence, from the time of Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) till the era of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), the conveyance of divine laws was the task of the infallible Imams (a.s.). During this period, the Islamic laws that Allah wanted to convey was transmitted in phases. The mode of conveyance was such that it was firmly established in the minds as well as the hearts of the companions and the commonality. Slowly but surely, these discussions took the form of books and treatises. This was the crucial phase that did not occur during the time of Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.) and Hazrat Moosa (a.s.). In other words, the Imams (a.s.) dictated the laws and discussions while their companions jotted them down. Of course, these companions did not belong to the celestial world. Rather, they were all humans possessing volition and freedom.
Among these independent and free individuals, Imam Husain (a.s.) had just seventy-two. Imam Ali (a.s.) had only four. Therefore, when Ali (a.s.) said, "O people! I wanted to reveal that which is concealed in my heart. I have a lot treasured in it. I want to teach you all these. Listen to it and note it down that you may derive benefit from it in the future and also allow others to profit from it", they did not pay heed to his advice and some even mocked at it.
Didn't Ali (a.s.) have even a small gathering to understand his teachings and fathom the treasures of his knowledge? Occasionally, he (a.s.) used to take a lone individual like Kumail Ibn Ziyad al-Nakhai (a.r.) to the desert and teach him a few things. So, he (a.s.) did not have the required people. Why? Because the people are free and it is decreed that Allah will not deal with people through coercion.
Imam Sadeq (a.s.) had four thousand (4000) students, who listened to him but only twenty or thirty of these could toe his line. They wrote books and had their gaze fixed on the future. But for implementation of the message, the number didn't suffice. For, at the level of conveyance, conflict of interests is absent and the only criteria are comprehension of concepts and mental preparedness. But at the stage of execution and implementation, conflict of interests does occur. Consequently, not more than seventy-two companions remain and others flee the scene.

Imam Sadeq (a.s.) had four thousand students at the level of conveyance and there were many others spread out in various nooks and corners.
Sometimes, a group of these used to come and enquire from him, "O son of Allah's Messenger! Since you have already conveyed the message, now rise and ensure its implementation!"
Imam (a.s.) asked, "With whose assistance?"
They used to reply, "With our support. We have a huge support base in Khorasan (a province in Iran) and they all send blessings (*salawaat*) for your well-being."
Imam Sadeq (a.s.) asked the man from Khorasan, "Are you among these die-hard supporters?"
He (a.s.) replied, "Yes, as I am their representative."
Imam Sadeq (a.s.) remarked, "Fine" and ordered the pit-fire to be lit. When the order was duly executed, he (a.s.) asked the man to repeat his claim.
He repeated, "You have a huge following in Khorasan and I am one of them. So what are you waiting for and why don't you rise in revolt?"
Imam (a.s.) commanded him to jump in the pit-fire. On hearing this command, he trembled and questioned, "Are you serious?"
Imam (a.s.) retorted, "Of course. I am serious."
He asked again, "Are you ***really*** serious?"
Imam (a.s.) shot back, "Well, it's an order."
He queried, "Is this command obligatory (*waajib*) or recommended (*mustahabb*)?"
Imam (a.s.) replied, "Obligatory."
He asked again, "Then what about my wife and children? What is the logic behind such a command? Certainly, such an order is not in conformity with rationality!"
Imam (a.s.) thundered, "This is an order. Go and jump in the pit-fire."
He said apologetically, "As of now, it is not possible for me to obey your command. Please excuse me!"
Imam (a.s.) accepted and said, "Good enough. Now wait for a while." Meanwhile, a companion of Imam (a.s.) entered and saluted, "Peace be on you, O son of Allah's Messenger!" Imam (a.s.) replied to his salutation, "Peace be on you too! Go and jump in the pit-fire." Although he had just entered, without the

slightest of refrain, he obeyed the command of Imam (a.s.) and jumped in the pit-fire[83].

Why did Imam Sadeq (a.s.) take such a test? He did so because Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) came at the stage of conveyance and passed through it successfully. But at the level of implementation, the best of his friends betrayed him and (during the battle of Siffin) refused to fight, justifying that since the enemy had raised the Quran, it was ***haraam*** (forbidden) for them to fight.

Therefore, Ali (a.s.) did convey the message successfully but at the level of execution, he could not meet with much success due to the lack of co-operation from ignorant among his followers. It was precisely this emotion that he (a.s.) expressed in the following statement:

« قصم ظهري رجلان : عالمٌ متهتِّك و جاهلٌ متنسكٌ ».

"*Two persons broke my back: The scholar, who tore the veil apart[84] and the pious ignorant worshipper.*[85]"

So, while Moaviyah on one hand, as an internal factor, acted as an obstacle in the implementation of the message, Shareeh Qazi and Hasan Basri acted on the other. They did not desire that the implementation must see the light of the day. For, some could not understand while others saw it going against their interests.

Now, as the implementation and execution could not materialize and actualize, does it mean that we go and sit in our houses? Certainly not. The best thing is at least to convey the message even if implementation is not possible. Keep conveying till one individual acts upon it, followed by one family, one city, till the entire universe acts upon it. Who? Me Imam Husain (a.s.), me Imam Sajjad (a.s.) will implement it in this manner. Well, if they resist our implementation, then what should we do? We will

[83] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 47, p. 123. Of course, I have not stated the exact wordings of the incident, mentioning only its gist. Also, traditions bearing such concepts are numerous while we have narrated just one to explain the point. (The remaining part of this tradition will be stated in the future).

[84] That is, they did not care to preserve our secrets

[85] Munyatul Mureed, by Shahid Saani, p. 61

continue to do our duty (conveyance) and will not sit idle. In the process, we will put the entire blame of non-implementation directly on the society, i.e. on individuals as well as the society as a whole. As the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) had warned,

« كلُّكم راعٍ . و كُلُّكم مسؤولٌ عن رعيَّته ».

"*All of you are shepherds and all of you will be questioned about your flock (of sheep).*[86]"

Thus, till the time of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) the process of conveyance was completed. That is, whatever had to be conveyed was duly done and the argument on them finalized so much so that no era could object against Allah on the Day of Judgment that the message did not reach to them.

In the time of the infallible Imams (a.s.), their students had compiled four hundred books captioned, "*Usul Arba' Maeh*" (Four Hundred Principles), comprising of divine laws and injunctions. This task of compilation and propagation of these principles was performed by the students of Imam Sadeq (a.s.). But suddenly, in the last days of the Imam's (a.s.) life, some events took place that only became obstructive factors but led to the people's deviation. Who played this mischief? The court of the Abbaside (dynasty) caused this harm in the name of Islam and created pseudo-scholars like Abu Hanifah. This man arrived on the scene and became a spoke in the wheel and a huge obstacle in the implementation of the divine message. But Imam Baqer (a.s.) and Imam Sadeq (a.s.) had performed their task in such manner that there was no further need of an infallible conveyor due to the presence of conveyance and message at social level that was to be completed in the time of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). That is, everything was now in black and white till the period of the eleventh Imam's Imamate. It was during his time that these writings took the form of books and collection of traditions arrived on the social scene. Students of Imams (a.s.) taught in various schools and the message of all Prophets, from Adam (a.s.) to the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) was conveyed in detail to the various nooks and corners of the Islamic world. If the unbelievers will ask Allah on the Day of

[86] Mustadrak Safinah al-Behaar by Ayatullah Ali Shahroodi Namazi (a.r.), vol. 4, p. 188; Nahj al-Fasaahah by Abul Qasim Paaendeh

Judgment as to where was the true Islam? They will be replied that in these very Muslim countries.

Then, the message was conveyed but why did implementation fail? For, had they co-operated during the time of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.), execution too would have been accomplished. In other words, the task that will be achieved by Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in the future will take effect whenever preparedness and mutual co-operation is found among the people.

Sometimes, we inform about a real incident that has occurred and at other times, we intend to outline the duties. For example, occasionally we state that it is not your obligation to heat the tea now but to wait till dusk and only then heat the tea. (assuming it is Ramazan). Thus, even if the guest is sitting and expecting to be served but if you are asked, 'why you aren't heating the tea?' you will reply, 'because I am not supposed to do it before its scheduled time'. If you are asked, 'How much time is left for dusk?' You will reply, 'Now, it is ten to seven and still another hour left for dusk.' Probably, you have made all the preliminiary arrangements to prepare tea but will not take any further steps to serve it.

Sometimes too, the time factor is not an issue and whenever the tea is prepared, we will readily drink it. It is under such circumstances that we say, 'Mister, rise and prepare tea.' If it is asked, 'Why you have not yet prepared the tea?' You will reply, 'The arrangements are not yet provided for.' Here, we shall ask about a fact, 'When will you provide tea for us?' The answer will be, 'Another hour or so.' Now, is this hour required because that is the time remaining for tea to be drunk, or because the arrangements will require an hour? This information is from the facts.

Similarly, if the discussion pertains to the facts that if the government of Ahle Bait (a.s.) belongs to the last era, and that Mahdi will reform the global society in it, and to longevity, and the lengthiness of occultation, then all these are facts, nothing else. That is, we cannot say that for the next two thousand years, there will be no news. For, it is said that if the required preparedness were found during the times of the previous Imams (a.s.), this revolution would have indeed taken place then. Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a.s.) had remarked that if his companions would have co-operated with and supported him,

he would have brought about this universal government. Unfortunately, they did neither. This is a fact and an undeniable reality. But this teamwork will certainly occur in the future.

Explaining the reasons for his peace treaty, Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a.s.) wrote a letter to Moaviyah, the contents of which are indeed a very important lesson for all of us. He (a.s.) wrote,

« لو وجدتُ صابرين عارفين بحقّي غير مْنكرين, ما سلَّمتُ لك و لا اعطيتُك ما تريدْ ».

"*Had I found friends who were patient and aware of my rights and not denying (my position), I would never have submitted to you nor would I have handed over to you what you desired*.[87]"

Here, two characteristics have been mentioned: Patience and Awareness because there are many who are aware of the rights but flee on the day of battle. Also, there are many who are patient and steadfast but are complete devoid of any recognition and awareness. Hence, Imam Mujtaba (a.s.) remarked that if I found companions who possessed these traits, certainly I would never have bowed down before you and would not have given to you what I had to. So, why did things reached to such a state? Because companions with these qualities were non-existent. The same concept was relayed by the following Imams (a.s.) like Imam Husain (a.s.), Imam Sajjad (a.s.), Imam Baqer (a.s.), etc. That is, if we had companions with the aforementioned characteristics and attributes, Bani Umayyah would not succeed in usurping our rights.

In some instances, the Imams (a.s.) have stated to some of their friends that had you not fled and allowed the Bani Umayyah to rule, our rights would not have been squandered. If you had not co-operated and assisted the Bani Umayyah, they would never succeed in grabbing our rights[88].

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[87] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 44, p. 45

[88] Al-Ghaibah, No'mani, p.177

To sum up the discussion, the conclusion that we reached to was that man is decreed to acquire perfection on his own volition. Man's volition is directly proportionate to the ability gifted to him by Allah. Allah knew from before that even if He granted this capacity and blessings, which He has gifted to Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to you and me, we will not become him and he is the one and only. Allah is not helpless that He cannot create by force but as the decree is for volition, then anything other than that will not take place. Therefore, but for the holy existence of Hazrat Baqiyatullah (a.t.f.s.), no other complete man exists on the face of the earth, worthy of implementing the divine laws for the formation of an universal government. And hence, He has preserved and protected him.

Another question is that whether preservation of Hazrat Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) is on the basis of compulsion or freewill? It should be known that a certain degree of difficulties and calamities in death reaches to everybody directly from the side of Allah. The Almighty keeps away these calamities and difficulties from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). These mishaps, to an extent, resulting in the death of a person, is from the side of other existents due to their own volition and if Allah wants, He can seize their freewill. In this case, freewill will be converted to compulsion. For example, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is present over here and I have a weapon by which I intend to assassinate him (God forbid). But my weapons fail at the time of perpetration of this heinous crime and consequently, this act of God is compulsion. Or, I raise my sword to severe his head from his body but Allah paralyses my hand and again I fail in my attempt to murder him. This too is a form of compulsion.

So, in the protection of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), Allah the Almighty keeps away all those factors that can effectively cause his death. Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) also keeps at bay those things that emanate from his own side and can become the reason of his death. Moreover, those reasons that are from the side of the people and can cause his death, are dispelled in two ways: One, he (a.t.f.s.) disappears from the eyes of the people so that they cannot cause any harm unto him and second, he appears and anybody who intends to injure him in any form, his weapon rusts and becomes ineffective.

The second option leads to compulsion. Then, what should be the mode of protection that Allah should adopt to preserve His one and only present proof (*hujjah*)? The answer is only occultation (*ghaibah*). Why? The reason being that if he appears, he will be killed and hence, he went into hiding. "*For he feared assassination*.[89]" Of course, this fear is not because he wants to live more so that he can enjoy life. Rather, he has a commitment to keep for which mankind needs him desperately and hence, survival is a necessity.

Here, they (the skeptics) ask: Why doesn't he reappear to fulfill his commitment? Why doesn't he come now? Or why he did not arrive four to five hundred years or a thousand years ago? We reply: Well, he would have come a thousand and four hundred years ago but the people did not co-operate with and assist him.

They ask again: Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) came to this world a thousand and hundred years ago, then how could he keep his commitment four hundred years ago? We reply: Fourteen hundred years ago, he appeared in the form of Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) and intended to fulfill Allah's promise but the people neither supported nor assisted him in this gigantic task.

Here, I shall conclude the discussion by reading out a beautiful and interesting treatise written with the help of one of the sisters.

Approximately, six to seven years ago, I had been to Langrud (a province in Iran), where there was a congregation of women. When I entered the gathering, I requested the ladies present that if anybody had a question, she can feel free to ask. Most of the participants of this congress were the daughters of the teachers. A girl, who was actually a daughter of one of the participants, expressed her desire to ask a question, which I duly conceded. She asked, "What is the reply to the statement made by George Jordache concerning Ali (a.s.)?" I questioned, "Which statement?" She replied, "The same statement that you had written two to three weeks back on a card."

The incident was that we had decided to hold a function in Tehran to celebrate the birthday of Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.). On the invitation card printed for the occasion, we had quoted an attractive sentence from George Jordache, a

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[89] Al-Ghaibah, No'mani, p. 177

Christian, regarding Ali (a.s.). The sentence went as follows: *'O world! What's wrong with you? Why don't you gather all your strength and bestow on us one Ali (a.s.) in every era, with his thought, his heart, his speech and his sword?[90]'* We had printed this statement behind the card and the girl who had asked the question received this invitation. Now, when we were visiting Langrud, she encountered us with her query concerning the statement.

I thought that the girl wanted me to elaborate on this statement in my response. Therefore, I started discussing about George Jordache and a comparison of thoughts of Ali (a.s.) with the charter of the United Nations, followed with the view of George Jordache. Finally, we reached to the printed statement in which he addresses the world that instead of giving us all these philosophers, thinkers, politicians, scientists, rights activists, etc. and all the strength that you have gathered in the form of Einstein, Galileo, Abu Ali Seena, etc., if you (world) would have given us only ONE Ali, everything would fall in place.

After being at pains to explain my viewpoint for about half an hour, the young girl remarked, "Mr. Iftekharzadeh, this is not the reply!" I retorted, "Are you trying to imply that you, a young girl from Langrud, while sitting here, want to reply to every statement that is being made throughout the world?" The girl shot back, "Do ***you*** mean that this has no answer?" I answered, "No! How can such a beautiful statement have any answer? It is glorifying Ali (a.s.) and whoever listens to it, appreciates it." The young girl audaciously remarked, "I have written a response to this statement of George Jordache. If you permit, I will read it out for those present." Without deliberating for even a second, I said, "Read!"

The young girl started reading. Initially, I was inattentive but after she had read two or three lines, I realized that what she was reading made considerable sense. After four or five lines, I saw that she herself was gripped by emotions, tears flowing down her cheeks. After eight or nine lines, I appreciated that the entire gathering was crying. I would like to confess, as there is nothing to hide from you, that after ten to twelve lines, I was in tears myself.

[90] Imam Ali: The Voice of Human Justice, George Jordache, vol. 1

The article was not of more than twenty lines but replete with content. Later, I requested her to pen it down for me and I still have her handwriting preserved with me. She was a student of Class V but at laying her hands on my invitation card, she wrote a riposte to the statement of George Jordache. The content of the rejoinder was as follows:

"George Jordache has made a statement concerning Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) (and reproduced the statement mentioned earlier). But I would like to say to him: Mr. George Jordache! You are lying! You don't desire Ali! Ali's God did give you Ali but you placed him under house arrest for twenty-five years and went after others. Thereafter, in the battle of Siffin, you left him stranded, burrowing a lone furrow!

George Jordache! You don't desire Ali! Ali's God gave you another Ali after the first Ali but you poisoned him and forced him into submission before Moaviyah.

George Jordache! You don't desire Ali! Ali's God gave you a third Ali but you left him alone in the desert of Karbala crying out for help, *"Is there a monotheist who fears Allah concerning our rights? Is there a refuge that hopes for divine reward in providing us protection?[91]"* But you raised his severed head on the spear and obeyed the instructions of Yazid!

George Jordache! You don't desire Ali! Ali's God gave you a fourth Ali but let him all alone in corner of the Masjid al-Haram (Ka'bah) and sought others!

She continued till he reached to this point: O George Jordache! There is one Ali now in our midst and on the face of this very earth. Yes, he possesses all the perfection of Ali, the forbearance of Hasan and the bravery of Husain but you do not seek him and run after others! For more than eleven hundred years, he has been crying, "*Is there any helper, who will assist me?*" But you have not sought him. So, you are a liar! You don't desire Ali!"

This was her treatise in its entirety. But the essence of the philosophy of occultation was brimming as to why Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is in hiding. O Allah! Why don't you manifest him? Allah the Almighty replies: Don't make such absurd demands for I have already manifested him! You will ask: Then where is he? He will reply: Ali, Hasan, Husain and the eight

[91] Maqtal al-Husain by al-Muqarram, p. 271

Imams after Husain, I sent them for a lengthy duration of two hundred and sixty years. But you killed them all while you didn't have the right to kill one free soul. You threw them in prison and jailed them.

Haroon al-Rashid, the Abbaside Emperor, comes to the grave of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and stands to pray two-rak'at namaz. The creatures of Allah stand behind him in emulation. Thereafter, he says, "O Messenger of Allah! Your son is a thorn in our path. Do you permit us to extern him from here? In daylight and public view, he forces Hazrat Musa Ibn Jafar (a.s.) to migrate from Medina to Baghdad and imprisons him[92] but not a single Muslim questions his actions!

Then really, you don't desire Ali! Now, if Allah manifests Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), what will you do with him? If conveyance is the aim, then all the Imams (a.s.) have made all these sacrifices and conveyance is complete. If the objective is implementation, then two possibilities exist: individual and social. In case of individual, there is no need for him to reappear, take this Tauzeehul Masaael and go and act on it. You can use it as well as your family members.

The conclusion of the discussion is:

Why is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in concealment? One reason is that he apprehends being killed and second, it is for the examination of the people because preparedness of the people is examined in occultation.

The question that arises is that why Allah doesn't destroy the person who becomes an obstacle in the way of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)? The answer is that because it is decided that co-operation should be voluntary.

When will Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) reappear? Whenever co-operation and support is found and hence, no time is fixed. For those who fix the time of his reappearance, it is said, "*Those who fix the time have lied*.[93]" If somebody claims that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will reappear after ten years, it implies that for the next nine years, relax and go to sleep. And hence it is declared, "*Those who fix the time have lied*."

[92] Oyoono Akhbaar al-Reza (a.s.) by Shaikh Saduq (a.s.) vol. 1, p. 73
[93] Behaarul Anwaar, Allamah Majlisi, vol. 52, p. 103

So, when is the time of reappearance? The answer is whenever Allah permits. And this permission is subject to your truthfulness.

Khwaja Naseer Tusi (a.r.), the renowned theologian, has summed the reason of occultation, as follows: "*His existence is a grace, his authority is another grace and his occultation is because of us.[94]*" In other words, if Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is not among us today, it is due to us.

This phrase, 'because of us', has been interpreted in various ways. Some are of the view that it implies that our eyes are not worthy enough to witness him or we don't deserve to see him. Both these suggestions are not the correct exegesis. The real interpretation is that we are still like the people of Ali's era! We are still like the people of Imam Hasan's era! We are still like the people of Imam Husain's era! We are those that when our knowledge increases, we start questioning the actions of Imam Sadeq (a.s.). When he orders to jump into the pit-fire, we ask the reason behind his command.

But if you jump into the pit-fire with absolute submission, the fire will not smolder you. For, the next man who entered (Haroon Makki, a very close companion of Imam), jumped straight into the fire but when the lid was raised, the man from Khorasan saw Haroon sitting comfortably and busy in Allah's remembrance. Then Imam Sadeq (a.s.) asked, "How many such people do you have in Khorasan?" He replied, "None!" Imam (a.s.) retorted, "So now onwards don't talk about uprising and revolt and simply improve yourself."

Of course, regarding the philosophy of occultation, there can be a thousand reasons of which we are unaware. But the gist can be stated as: Fear of being killed, the possibility of similar circumstances as prevailed during the times of the previous Imams (a.s.) and their not revolting, the failed revolt of Hazrat Ali (a.s.), etc. All such events explain to us that the main factor of occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the non-co-operation of the people. It is only after an atmosphere of co-operation is prepared that Imam (a.s.) will reappear. In other words, if Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) had two Malik Ashtars and was defeated, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) must have at least three hundred Malik Ashtars. Hence, in traditions we find that Imam-

[94] Sharh Tajreed al-Aqaaed, Qushji, p. 376

e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will have 313 companions and helpers like Malik Ashtar, who will co-operate with each other and assist him in forming a global government.

Of course, these 313 are the closest companions of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Besides them, there will be thousands of other supporters and soldiers, who will be required to support, help and co-operate with these 313 companions[95] and obey their commands. May Allah enumerate us among the helpers and companions of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)!

[95] These second ring soldiers will not be like the closest companions but will be quite similar to them.

The Philosophy of Occultation- An appendix

The discussion was concerning the philosophy of occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). The question was that why did Allah the Almighty make Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) disappear? Was Allah helpless in creating another person or persons like Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) that He had to preserve him for the appointed-day? Is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) more important than the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) that Allah the Almighty did not preserve the latter but treasured the former? If Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is decreed to work with divine power after his reappearance, then why is it that he (a.t.f.s.) reappears now itself and utilizes the same powers to achieve the same objectives? When Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) reappears, what will be the main factor or element in his success? Certainly, these will be knowledge, power and perfection conferred on him by Allah the Almighty. Thus, he (a.t.f.s.) should bring those powers with himself at this very juncture to accomplish his purpose. So, why is there delay in reappearance? This discussion was pertaining the philosophy of occultation and our conclusion was that Allah has decided that man, in this world, should achieve perfection on his own volition.

In the discussion of creation, we studied that Allah the Almighty decided to appoint His Caliph on the earth and decreed that his actions should be on the basis of his own freewill, and not compulsion or coercion. That is, Allah the Almighty says that this is the path of caliphate and now, you tread it on your own volition.

Once, you take a person in a helicopter and leave him on top of a mountain. It cannot be said that he has climbed the height on account of his own efforts because he was carried. At another time, someone is ordered, 'Go!' He asks, 'Where?' 'I don't know' is the response that he receives. 'How? With what?' are the questions that he asks again and the answers are the same, 'I don't know'. Definitely, such an order is invalid and cannot be implemented.

If somebody is ordered, “This is the way, this is the mode of transport, this is the support and strength, and in short, all that you require, now go and tread the path yourself.” Here it’s possible that he may complete the journey in the shortest time possible or perhaps, he may take years or even decades and yet fail to reach the destination. Possibly, he might take ten steps ahead and twenty steps back, goes four levels high but falls into a deep pit.

Therefore, on the basis of our belief, the entire theory of Historical Determinism is refuted. That is, historical progress does not necessarily ensure perfection because history is not like a flower that blossoms in the due course of time. We can evaluate the journey of perfection nicely at this juncture. Like, we can say that next year if we come here for *Iftaar*[96], this flower will have reached to this height of the wall, traversing the path of natural growth because this journey is regulated and hence, involuntary. Of course, since this flower does come in contact with the free and independent man, it is also quite possible that children might pluck it. But if left alone and the required conditions are provided for, it will certainly acquire certain perfection.

But man is not so. You and I are in a certain level of spiritual perfection. In particular, in the blessed month of *Ramazan,* we have ascended a few steps via fasting, prayers, supplications, etc. and traversed a distance in our quest for perfection. But a few weeks after this holy month, when we indulge in self-appraisal, we will realize that we don’t possess that same light and resplendence in our spirituality that we enjoyed at the end of this holy month. It is also not that we will pause at the level of the progress that we have made. Rather, it would not be surprising if we even go a few steps backwards.

Secondly, every individual, in his pursuit to attain the status of a worshipper and divine caliphate, requires two things: One, he must know the mode of quest and second, (after knowing) he must strive and make efforts. In other words, **knowledge** and **action**, both are pre-requisites to achieve this aim. Thus, man can fly with these two wings and can reach the highest of peaks and conquer the zenith of perfection. Knowledge (i.e. the mode of quest) should be conveyed to him and thereafter, the onus of

[96] Time of breaking of the fast

action and implementation of this knowledge on a personal level lies on him. Therefore, Prophets (a.s.) used to come and inform the people that the mode of pursuit to attain divine caliphate is this, so move and march ahead. If he obeys, he becomes a divine caliph. He does not wait to move along with history. Such is the speed of his progress that soon he becomes a perfect man.

In other words, people of the era of reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) are not the most perfect people of all times. Certainly, a few thousand years prior to reappearance, there must be somebody who must have reached the summit of perfection. Besides, we even know of some people who came more than a thousand years before reappearance but were as perfect as Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) himself, or even more. They are the holy beings of the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.).

Hence, it is possible for man to reach his destination without waiting for anybody. Of course, for a universal government, he has to wait but not for his own self. So, he should understand and proceed. Now, if he is alone, understands and moves swiftly, naturally he will reach his destination. If a family understands and moves swiftly, they will reach ther destination. If a city understands and moves swiftly, it will reach its destination. If the entire mankind understands and moves swiftly, it will reach the destination. Precisely, this is the reason why no time has been assigned for reappearance.

On an individual level, if we ask somebody, ‘When will you attain perfection?’ He cannot reply, ‘In another ten years time.’ Rather, he will say, ‘As and when I understand the mode of pursuit, I will proceed and reach.’ The same applies for the society. Hence, these two levels viz. conveyance and implementation apply for the individual as well as the society.

Thereafter, we had a historical discussion that from Hazrat Adam (a.s.) till the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) till Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), was the level of conveyance. Of course, conveyance was on a universal plane but implementation was on the levels of an individual, a family, a city, etc. Thus, the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) did not say that we shall form our government after the message has been conveyed universally. Just as, on a personal level, we don’t wait for the message to be conveyed to others, and start implementing it ourselves after we

have received the message; the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) too placed the responsibility of implementation on the communicated one. That is, each one was his own leader with regards to the implementation of the message. Therefore, if one village can establish a true Islamic government, it must immediately do so and if a city is able to do so, it must go ahead.

So, to implement divine orders none of the Prophets, Messengers or Imams (a.s.) waited for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) but did the job themselves. Then for what should the people wait {for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)}? They must wait for execution on a global scale. You can do it on an individual plane, for your family, for your village or for your city. At the most, for your city, it should be under the supervision of a learned jurist. For yourself, you are there. For a family, paternal guidance is a pre-requisite. For the innate existence of the body, intellect is the authority. For a city, the authority of the jurist reigns. But for the entire universe, only an infallible Imam can ensure its implementation.

Incidentally, at the level of implementation, we said that Allah deals with a free man, whether he treads this path or he doesn't. As He has to encounter the free and independent human being, all these wars, fights and disputes arise, and Prophets were killed while Allah observed all these perpetrations. Of course, it should be borne in mind that Allah's hands are not tied but He has decreed that man's pursuit to perfection should be based on his own volition.

A school principal can give a positive report card to his son and even hand him the diploma. But he refuses to do so because his son has not studied well enough. Thus, it is agreed that the swimmer must swim and win. If we want, we can simply take him to the other side. In this case, we can just hold him in our arms, put him aboard an ark and take him over to the other side. But, on the flip side, we teach him how to swim, put him in the water and allow him to swim and search for himself. Meanwhile, we keep a watch on him to prevent him from drowning. When he learns to swim, we tell him to be on his own. Man and society are such. And because man is free, possessing an independent intellect and volition, disputes and wars occur.

Therefore, for the formation of a government, the existence of a leader is not enough. The story goes as follows that during one of his many battles, Nadir Shah, the Emperor of Iran, saw a soldier fighting with enormous skill. Nadir Shah asked him, 'Where were you at the time of Shah Sultan Husain?' The soldier retorted, 'I was there but you were not.' Well, this incident occurred with Nadir Shah but many use it for their benefit even today. Of course, the soldier's riposte to his king is not valid in all cases. One cannot blame the lack of an efficient leader for all defeats. Very often, there are good leaders but people's non co-operation, lack of belief and lethargy are the reasons for defeats.

Imam Ali (a.s.) remaining confined to his house for 25 years, Imam Hasan's (a.s.) truce, Imam Husain's (a.s.) martyrdom and similarly, the imprisonment and sidelining of the remaining Imams (a.s.), the occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), and the non-advancement and crushing defeats of the Shias of Ali (a.s.) during occultation, all are due to the soldiers like the one in the aforementioned incident. They blame the leader for all their sins. The sycophant auditor separates the account of Nadir from that of other leaders and the Nadirs of different eras too welcomed such flattery. But our Imams (a.s.) are not made of this mould. When Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) reappears, he will not allow such flatterers and sycophants to gather around him. The infallible Imams (a.s.) did not take the responsibility of the sins of the people on their shoulders by acknowledging that they were not in mood to guide them. Rather, they lay the entire blame at the door of the people saying that '*we are under regular incarceration because of your apathy*.'

Imam Sadeq (a.s.) remarked to one of his followers who worked in the court of Caliphate, '*If you had not been to his court, our right would not have been usurped. If you would not have supported him, our condition would not be as it is now.*' Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a.s.) wrote to Moaviyah, '*If I had patient, cognizant friends, I would never have submitted to you.*' Hence, we see that all the problems lie with the people.

Therefore, the occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is due to the masses. They were the ones who neither supported Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) nor Imam Hasan (a.s.) nor Imam Husain (a.s.). Unless the people don't desire one sound government, even if a thousand governments are formed, all

are bound to lick defeat. Till the nation continues to wander in ignorance, the present status will persist. Till the populace lacks steadfastness and firmness and remain stomach-worshippers, this pathetic and wretched state will continue.
Now, what is expected from the nation to transform things? Which nation? The nation that is firm and steadfast in the path of truth. Of course, if the majority sides with falsehood, falsehood will remain but if the majority favors truth, truth will survive. This role of nation in the preservation of truth or falsehood is extremely vital and critical.
Thus, we should deliberate as to how we can guide the masses towards truth. For, if we proceed with the present state, always falsehood will rule and its proponents will continue to dominate the majority. Then, this is another line in the history of the universe. That is, if the majority persists with its ignorance, and dishonest governments continue to rule the uninformed majority, a universal government based on justice and equity will never see the light of the day.
The response to this dilemma is that notwithstanding the fact that the majority is dominated by a machiavellian government founded on falsehood but if the minority is steadfast and well-informed, it can lead the majority towards awareness, snatch the majority from the clutches of its rulers and within a short span of time, bring about a complete transformation. Of course, this is practical but for its accomplishment, a steadfast, firm and cognizant minority is a pre-requisite.
From this extremely miniscule minority, Hazrat Ali (a.s.) had five trustworthy companions, Imam Hasan (a.s.) had two, Imam Husain (a.s.) had forty to fifty, Imam Sajjad (a.s.) had four and so on and so forth. One day, Imam Sadeq (a.s.) was walking in the desert with his close confidante, Sudair Sairafi, when the latter asked, “Why don’t you rise in revolt despite having thousands of friends and supporters?” “*Are you interested in giving me company to the outskirts of Medina?*” asked the Imam (a.s.). Sudair gave his consent. Imam (a.s.) mounted his ass while Sudair rode a mule till they came outside Medina and the time of prayers arrived. They alighted from their mounts and performed their prayers. Meanwhile, they saw a child busy grazing his flock of goats. Imam (a.s.) looked at the goats and remarked, “*O Sudair! If I had companions equal to the number of the goats of this flock, I would have definitely revolted.*” When

Sudair commenced counting the goats, he saw that they did not exceed seventeen in number[97].
It is essential to have an informed minority, who with their firmness and steadfastness can take the majority to a state from where things can take off. Occasionally, Allah the Almighty has shown to the people some models of this minority.
Therefore, the substance of the discussion lies in the fact that people transform themselves to the extent that when Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) reappears, they must not inflict him with calamities and difficulties they wreaked on Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.); they must not inflict him with misfortunes and troubles they wreaked on Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a.s.); they must not cause him setbacks and problems they meted out to Muslim Ibn Aqeel (a.s.); they must not inflict him with tragedies and heartbreaks they caused on Imam Husain (a.s.) and his companions. Till such eventualities are not insured against, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will ***not*** reappear. Does it mean that such calamities and difficulties will not befall Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)? When a considerable amount of people will be amongst the patient and cognizant friends of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), they will guard the key positions of his government during reappearance and stand by him with solidity and firmness.
For approximately 25 years, Zubair (Ibn Awaam) was the companion of Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.). But when Ali (a.s.) became the Caliph, he refused to support him. Hence, the philosophy of occultation is that people should co-operate with and support their leader to achieve the aim.
Well, but you have not experienced our non co-operation to pass such a judgment? He will reply, “How many more times should we examine you? In a span of 265 years, we examined you eleven times but you were busy in your own affairs!”
We ask, “Then will you forsake us?” He replies, “No! We will not desert you. But whenever things will change for the better and you improve yourselves, we will cause the reappearance.” We retort, “We can’t understand what you mean.” He says, “We (Ahle Bait) have conveyed the message to you and shown you the path. Then you take a few steps towards us to expect us to come to you.” From this juncture onwards, no further excuses

[97] Behaar al-Anwaar, Allamah Majlisi, vol. 47, p. 373

will be accepted from the people. For, had Ali (a.s.) gone into occultation, people had the right to say that we can't follow? If Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (a.s.) had gone into hiding, they could've demanded that conveyance is not yet complete. But not now, after all the books of jurisprudence, traditions, exegeses, Islamic sciences, etc., you and I don't have the right to complain that we were unaware of our obligations and duties. No, we knew, and hence cannot forward apologies or excuses for our non-implementation.

Here, yet another poser can be forwarded: If I implemented the message at an individual level but others did not heed my advice, what is my duty? Nothing. For, you have attained the zenith of divine caliphate and there's no need for further worries. If you have discharged your personal obligations, even if others have not regarded your admonishments and Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has not yet reappeared, certainly you will be enumerated among his companions and helpers! What more do you desire?! You have reached that position and others have not! You are certainly not higher in position than the infallible Imams (a.s.). They could not succeed in shoring the society to that status nor did you. But, on a personal scale, they reached and so did you.

Among our discussions was that, "Is it not possible for Allah to create another person like Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)?" The answer is that Allah the Almighty can do so via compulsion but if it has to be done on human volition, it's begging the question. Is it not possible for Allah the Omnipotent to make all men like Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)? Obviously, He can do so but it will involve compulsion but as stated earlier, He has decreed volition as the system of this universe. The Holy Quran has also talked about this issue, when it says,

« و لو شاء ربك لآمن من في الأرض كلُّهم جميعاً ».

"*And had your Lord willed, everybody in the earth would have certainly believed*.[98]"

So, Allah wants man to do things of his own volition. But most of the people don't believe voluntarily. If Allah so desires, He can

[98] Surah Yunus (10) : 99

surely create a person like Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) by force, but then such a person, created through coercion is definitely different from our Imam (a.s.). For, the present Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is having this position because of his volition and freewill while the forced one would have no superiority at all whatsoever. And of course, Allah the Omnipotent **does** have creatures, who are regulated through coercion but He had decided not to send them. It is His decree to raise free and independent human beings for this mission.

* * *

To conclude the discussion, we debated a few questions concerning the philosophy of occultation of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). We hinted at the reason as to why Allah the Almighty did not hide the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and Ameerul Momineen Ali (a.s.) from the eyes of the people. We also talked about our responsibilities and the general masses. People, generally, are of two kinds: One group is of the unaware ones and is therefore not responsible for implementation and execution. The onus of its guidance lies on the shoulders of those who are aware and informed. That is, those who are in the know, must strive in the implementation of what they know and convey the message to others as well. It is this argument that brings the cause of occultation at the doorstep of the Shias. It is for the Shias to move in this direction. Hence, we quoted the statement of Khwaja Naseer Tusi (a.r.), "*His existence is grace, his authority is grace and his occultation is because of us*." All the infallible Imams (a.s.) have placed this responsibility on our shoulders and we are the ones, who actually don't want Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).

* * *

In this part of the discussion on the philosophy of occultation, the following question is raised: When will the time come when we shall truly crave for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)? In this regard, there are a few conditions. One, before everything else, truly and really, we desire Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Usually, in normal circumstances, man does not crave for him but when he is in difficulty, problems and in real catastrophic conditions, wittingly or unwittingly, he submits. For example, we humans

sometimes go the doctor before we fall sick and at other times, we go to him only when we are extremely ill, restive and helpless. There are yet others who will visit the doctors only in cases of extreme feelings of weakness and vulnerability.

Therefore, those who call out "*Yaa Saaheb al-Zaman*" are the informed and cognizant Shias. On the other hand, the sea of majority belongs to those, who will seek out the helping hand of a lifeguard only when they are on the brink of being drowned. At this juncture, they will hold on to any stick and straw that is thrown out at them. Thinking that they have found the ark of salvation, their joy knows no bounds.

The people of the world must not rely and hope for help from any thing that is thrust at them. Rather, they should wait for a real ship of deliverance, and when they find it, they must board it immediately without hesitation and be comfortable. Otherwise, till broken arks and canoes are found in the sea, they will never wait for the real ship. Hence, we find in traditions that the government of the infallible Imams (a.s.) will arrive only and only when people despair of everything and at the worldly level, they become hopeless of all that they relied on[99].

When man despaired of religious scholars, he sought refuge in knowledge itself. Knowledge provided him a gift through world wars I and II. The world got together and formed a body called the United Nations (UN). Initially, the UN boasted and attracted the minds of the people. It made tall claims of establishing universal peace, bringing an end to all wars, wiping out poverty and illiteracy from the face of the earth, and formed various types of commissions, etc. Now, after hardly half a century has passed, when we raise our heads to look at the achievements of the UN, we find that ignorance has increased, mischief and corruption is on the rise, wars have intensified, slavery has been abolished on a personal level only to be found among nations. Previously, they threw two slaves in the arena to fight each other and derived pleasure out of it. But now, they pitch two nations against each other and enjoy the mass killings and bloodshed.

[99] Behaar al-Anwaar, Allamah Majlisi, vol. 52, p. 231, "*He will reappear when people will become despondent and desolate of salvation*."

Thus, when man raises his head and sees that all his hopes are dashed, and realizes that there is actually no real hope from any quarter except the ark of salvation, he will no longer inflict calamities and cause tragedies to Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) as he had done earlier. This is the state of the masses in general and that of the Shias in particular. Hence, when it is said that at the time of reappearance, the world will be replete with injustice and inequity, it does not mean that it is our duty to fill it with injustice and inequity. Rather, it implies that when oppression, tyranny, injustice and inequity envelope the entire globe, humanity will actually get fed up with all these and will wait, in its truest sense, for a universal reformer.

Therefore, as traditions state that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will reappear when the earth is full of injustice and oppression, many uphold the aforementioned view, which is an independent discussion in itself and shall be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

Till now, we have discussed the philosophy of occultation. We mentioned that divine examination and protection of people's faith, which Allah tests in various conditions and ways, was one aspect of this discussion. Preparedness of the people during occultation is another facet. Yet, there may be a thousand other reasons of occultation, as to why Allah the Almighty and Omniscient has chosen this path, which may be hidden and concealed from us.

So, we never claimed during our discussion that this and only this is for sure the reason behind occultation. Rather, we stated that most of these talks are what we can decipher from the history of the infallible Imams (a.s.). Examination, readiness, role of people, and other rationales related to Allah of which we are unaware. Hence, we confessed right in the beginning that only Allah knows the real objective behind occultation and we have no right to intervene in His tasks. "*For surely knowledge is with Allah*."

Reapparance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) vis-à-vis excess of oppression and injustice

Among the important discussions that is being debated in the society nowadays and many have been unable to find a suitable answer to it is the question: Is it necessary and essential for the world to be replete with injustice and oppression to enable Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to reappear?

Will he (a.t.f.s.) not come if there is not enough of oppression and tyranny? Moreover in furtherance to these questions, another query is raised: Then should we increase oppression and injustice to prepare the ground for his reappearance or no, this is not our duty?

Since this discussion is not yet clear for the common people, hence numerous misconceptions and wrong notions have cropped up in their minds. Consequently, some even have the idea that any step taken in the way of reformation is a step backwards vis-à-vis the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and hence, we must do our best to spread mischief and corruption in the land so that he (a.t.f.s.) comes faster.

On analyzing these questions, we realized that incidentally the question of spreading mischief and corruption, notwithstanding its absurdity and inanity, is a theory with revolutionary face in the modern world. The originator of such an idea was **Karl Marx** who propounded, "*Till discontent does not reach boiling point, revolution cannot occur*." Then, following the instructions of Marx, what should be done? Definitely, one must try to increase mischief in the land and create as many hindrances as possible in the way of reformations and improvements in order to augment discontent to pave the path for a revolution!!

Therefore, the communists were of the view that we must enter the intelligence service, torture the people, torment the innocent, pluck out their nails, etc. so that when they are released from the prisons, they will abuse the government and help the people develop a negative opinion about the rulers. Marxists doctors also refrained from treating the sick in hospitals and clinics and created such delays in their treatment

that the sick would die. This would anger the relatives of the deceased who formed the view that doctors of government hospitals don't treat the patients and act as catalysts in reaching them to the graveyard. All these steps were taken to increase discontent among the people to pave the way for a revolution of the proletariat. Following such theories, the communists of the former regime as well as during the present times are trying their best to destabilize things in the country. This was precisely the reason why they opposed the installation of *Qarzul Hasanah*[100] boxes in mosques, as it would drug the people into numbness and inaction.
All the opponents of establishment of private polyclinics in the Islamic nation (of Iran) were leftists who were indirectly responsible for the slogans of the intellectual elite as well as few religious scholars declaring from the pulpits, "Why are you drugging the people? Instead of admitting these patients in private hospitals, send them to government hospitals that they must encounter problems and difficulties and consequently, shout 'death to the government'!!" The leftists projected this move as a revolutionary step. Exactly like the doctor who sits in the hospital and does not attend to the sick. Or like some government servants who warm their office seats, draw their salaries but deliberately don't solve the people's problems or will create obstacles in their paths. They will make them run from pillar to post for a small work in order to disenchant the public from the government. If the action of the leftists and the communists is revolutionary, then indeed the aforementioned doctor and government servant are also revolutionaries of the highest caliber, albeit with Marxist support.
Therefore, the matter of increasing discontent and restlessness is not a thought that is propounded by ignoramuses and believed by others on the basis of a few traditions. Rather, it can also turn serious when given a social and revolutionary color for universal acceptance.
But our Shia faith rejects all such theories, and on the basis of Islamic values and principles, does not consider it as a premise for the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).
Well, then how would one justify the following tradition, which is as clear as daylight when it prophesies,

[100] Interest free loans

« يملأ اللّهْ به الارض قسطا و عدلاً كما ملئت ظلماً و جورا » .

"*Through him (Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)), Allah will fill the earth with justice and equity as it would be fraught with injustice and oppression*[101]."

At the first instance, this tradition is pretty eloquent in its prophecy that the primary task of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) would be to fill the earth with justice and equity, as it would be fraught with injustice and oppression. Hence, some have misconstrued this tradition like one says, 'the dining cloth will not be spread unless the room is full of people." Now, if he does not spread the dining cloth, we ask, 'Mister! Why have you not spread the dining cloth?' He replies, 'I said that I will not spread it till the room is packed with people.' So, if you really have few people and intend to spread the dining cloth, then you must go on the road, get a few people for dinner and then spread it! They have misinterpreted the above tradition in this very manner when they say that the world should be **'full'** of injustice and tyranny for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to reappear. If it is asked as to why he has not yet reappeared? They answer because the earth lacks in inequity and oppression!
The discussion I want to present for you today is the same that I did eighteen years ago and the method of analysis that I will adopt today is exactly the same too. In order to draw complete attention of the audience, I told them that if you intend to truly await Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), then what should you do? Fill the earth with oppression and tyranny. We are in a class and say that the teacher will not come till the class is full of students. Now, what should the students do, who are truly awaiting their teacher? Obviously, they will stand at the door of the school and bring all those students who are playing in the nooks and corners of the school, in the classroom, to facilitate the arrival of the teacher. Similarly, if we want to become true awaiters, we must fill the earth with injustice and oppression because our religion has ordered us, "*The best action is to await the reappearance.*[102]" That is, awaiting the reappearance is better than all other acts like prayer, fasting, etc. Awaiting salvation

[101] Muntakhab al-Asar by Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 247
[102] Behaarul Anwaar by Allamah Majlisi, vol. 52, pp. 122-150

implies striving for it and in this context, the best thing to do would be to fill the earth with injustice and oppression!!

In all the gatherings in which I raised this issue, I first asked: This is the doubt. Do you have any answer for it? In more than a hundred speeches, I raised this question. Of these, I received only one response and that too was quite an interesting refutation from an eleven-year-old boy. He replied, "Our duty is to fight against oppression and tyranny." I retorted, "It is not so. For, although it is your duty to fight against oppression and tyranny, you have an even more important obligation and that is to wait for the reappearance. Waiting for the reappearance implies that you do all those things by which Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) reappears. And of course, he (a.t.f.s.) will not reappear till the earth is full of injustice and oppression." I continued, "The gathering in which you are sitting now, your act and the gathering itself are violations of trust of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Why? Because he (a.t.f.s.) says that I will not come till the earth is fraught with injustice and inequity. So, you must see to it that there are no such gatherings!"

On hearing this reply, the young boy kept quiet. But after a few moments, he sought permission to speak again and replied, "Did you not say that our gathering was breach of trust?" I responded in the affirmative. He said, "Did you not say that the world should be full of oppression, tyranny and violations?" I said, "Certainly." He replied, "Fine! Now, on the basis of your objection, we are playing our part in hastening the reappearance through violations of trust on holding such congregations. As you have said that the world should be full of violations and breach of trust, for Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to reappear. So, we are not doing anything wrong and are actually waiting for the reappearance. Through our violations, we are helping the cause of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) as per your own confession."

Well, this answer did not provide a solution but nevertheless, it did contravene the objection. So, let us attempt to find a real solution to this objection.

The contents of the tradition under discussion were as follows:

« يملأ اللّهُ به الارض قسطا و عدلا لأ كما ملئت ظُلماً و جورا »

"*Through him (a.t.f.s.), Allah will fill the earth with justice and equity as it would be fraught with injustice and oppression*."

In another tradition from Imam Muhammad Baqer (a.s.), the word ***like*** has been used[103] instead of *as* but it does not make any difference to our argument. In this tradition, to find a solution to the problem, we shall discuss three critical terms i.e. (a) it would be filled with (b) injustice and oppression, and (c) like it would be filled with or after it is filled with.

(a) In the term *'it would be filled with'*, being *'full'* is relative. Full of what? Because the consequence of being full has different connotations for different things. Like, the room being packed with people has one meaning while the room being full of flowers has a totally different connotation, and the room being full with fragrance has yet another implication. Quite often it is said, 'the room was brimming with perfume'. Well, if the room is full of fragrance does it imply by any means that there is no carpet in that room, sofa or table in it? Does it mean that there are no humans, chandelier, or lampshade in it? Or no, while the room is bursting with fragrance, it has all other things in it as well? Thus, to state that the room is filled with fragrance does not contradict the fact that there are other things in it too. Similarly, we often say that the road is packed with cars while we are seeing that there are a number of people walking on it. Yet, the statement that the roads are packed with cars is valid. Likewise, we state that the city garden is bursting with trees and flowers despite the fact that there are numerous people roaming in it. To sum it up, contrast of a thing that is full should be from a thing belonging to the same species, not to other species.

[103] Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 36, p. 359. Of course, this term has also been used in Doa-e-Adeelah but Shaikh Abbas Qummi (a.r.), on the authority of his teacher Mirza Mohaddis Noori (a.r.), considers this supplication to be from some scholars and not from the infallible Imams (a.s.). In the last tauqee of Hazrat Baqiyatullah (a.t.f.s.) to the last special deputy, as mentioned earlier, it has come, "*This (reappearance) will occur only after a lengthy duration, the hardening of hearts and the earth being replete with injustice and inequity*."

(b) “Oppression and tyranny” means to transgress, to violate unlawfully and injustice. This is distinct from mischief and disbelief. When we say, “full of oppression and tyranny”, it neither suggests being replete with those who abandon their prayers (*taarek al-salaat*) nor those who don’t fast nor other ethical violations, and not even polytheism and disbelief. It just means oppression. Incidentally, the idea of oppression does not indicate in any way that each and every individual should be an oppressor. The term ‘oppression’ is very much like perfume in the aforementioned example of the room being fragrant. Thus, it is possible that the world is enveloped with injustice and oppression yet there exist some individuals who are piety and justice personified.

For the world to be full of injustice and oppression does not mean you and me start beating each other, I abandon the prayers while you become an atheist. Certainly, it is not so. We can say that on the day of Aashura, injustice and tyranny surrounded Karbala. But in these very circumstances, Imam Husain (a.s.) was also present there. Does this, by any chance, suggest that God forbid, Imam Husain (a.s.) also was an oppressor? For the validity of the statement ‘*being filled with injustice and oppression*’, it is not essential that we become corrupt, mischief-makers, impious, transgressors, polytheists, unbelievers, etc. Rather, it is sufficient that two powers clash with each other and kill the innocents, and yet there is a nation that is virtuous and righteous.

Therefore, if oppression and tyranny seize the world, why should you rule on the basis of inequity? Why should you help and assist the cause of mischief and corruption? It is not that if you are good, the world will not become fraught with evil. Regardless of you being good or evil, it is possible that the world will be full of evil and it is also possible that it might not. Hence, the concept of the world becoming full of injustice and oppression is in no way contradictory with me or you or a particular family or tribe become moral and righteous.

(c) The words ‘*like or after it would be fraught with*’ merely relate the circumstances prevalent at the time of reappearance and don’t speak about the stipulation necessary for it. Let us elucidate the point further: For everything, we have two kinds of things; one is stipulation and the other is the time and place for its occurrence. For instance, is sunset ***a stipulation*** for you to serve *Iftaar* or is sunset ***the time*** of serving *Iftaar*? Obviously, the latter holds true and not the former. Now, if we want to do something that you may serve *Iftaar* earlier, should we try to change the course of the sun that it may set sooner? Definitely not, because changing the course of the sun is beyond our control.

By stipulation or prerequisite, we mean that like it is said: Anybody who comes late to the *Majlis* should give a treat to others. This is a stipulation or a pre-requisite. Sometimes, I say that I will come to your house at 3 p.m. Here, my coming to your house at the appointed time is not the condition for my coming; rather it is the time of my coming to your house. At other times, I say that I will come to your house only if its door remains open. Now, this ‘if’ implies stipulation and if you desire that I should visit your house, you should keep its door open.

Similarly, the world becoming full of injustice and oppression is NOT the stipulation for the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). In fact, it speaks just about the state of affairs at that time. Traditions merely talk about the situation then and never imply that till the earth does not become full of injustice, oppression and tyranny, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) will not reappear. They simply state that when he (a.t.f.s.) arrives, he will fill the earth with justice and equity after it would be fraught with injustice and oppression. Thus, it is possible that a stipulation can be the obligation of the people but time is never a duty of those who wait because it is not in their control.

The most significant proof that injustice and oppression is not the stipulation for the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the fact that the cause of occultation

was not the scarcity or lack of injustice and oppression. For, when a thing is a pre-requisite, it holds some significance. For example, I say that till everybody does not sit down, I will not speak. You see that I am standing but am not speaking. One of you stands up and says, "Mr. Iftekharzadeh! Commence your speech soon!" I reply, "I said that I will not speak till everybody sits down." Now, if others ask this gentleman that why Mr. Iftekharzadeh is not commencing his speech, he will give the same reason i.e. since everybody is not sitting down, he is not beginning his address. If I am asked, I too will cite my condition for beginning my talk. Thus, if the ***condition and stipulation*** for my speech is the sitting down of people, then certainly, the ***cause*** of my silence is the standing of the people.

On the same lines, if the condition for the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the world becoming full of injustice and oppression, then the cause of occultation must be definitely their paucity and shortage. Now, is it true that when Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) went into occultation, injustice and oppression were lacking in the world? Did he (a.t.f.s.) announce to Motamid, the Abbaside ruler, that since you are not perpetrating enough atrocities and injustices, I am going into hiding, and will reappear only and only when your oppression and violence will reach to my desired limits! Did Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) rebuke the people of that era that I am going into occultation because all of you are quite religious, and will manifest myself only when you become irreligious and impious? During the world wars, did Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) say to the warring countries "Excellent! Thank you very much! Please continue to fight and spread carnage that I may reappear at the earliest!"?

Therefore, if filling of the earth with injustice, tyranny and mischief is the pre-requisite for the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), he (a.t.f.s.) must really appreciate and thank all the tyrants, oppressors and mischief-mongers of the world as they are helping his cause. But is this the case? Since we know the impropriety and falsity of the claim that Imam-e-Zaman

(a.t.f.s.) did not go into occultation because of the shortage of injustice and oppression then, we can easily conclude that filling of the earth with injustice and oppression will never be the pre-requisite for his reappearance. Consequently, this tradition will never become a stipulation and it will be wrong on our part to say that this is the cause of the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Anybody, who attempts to interpret the tradition in this manner, has actually not understood Islam correctly.

To complete the discussion and classify our duties, let us cite an example here, which incidentally will clarify a number of problems, besides illuminating our obligations.

Suppose we have a class and the principle says to the students: Children! Your teacher will come late to the class. Even if one minute remains for the class to end, he will definitely arrive and discharge his duty. So, the arrival of the teacher is a certainty. The students know that when the teacher enters the class he will convert the noisy and undisciplined class into a disciplined and controlled one. He will reprimand and punish the saboteurs and mischief-makers and throw them out of the class. As a result, the noisy class will become a calm and controlled one that he may teach peacefully. Thus, you dear students must wait for your teacher.

Meanwhile, the principal selects one student as a monitor. Also, he requests him to ensure discipline in the class and revise the previous lesson for the students. Moreover, the principal reminds all the students of the class that he, along with their teacher, will keep a watch over them from the upper window.

One of the students asks: When will our teacher come? The principal replies: I can't say! Maybe he might come after half an hour, or ten minutes, or five minutes, or just before the final bell rings. But you wait for him, regardless of the time of his arrival.

After the principal walks out of the class, there are four probabilities concerning the situation of the class:

Firstly, the monitor thinks, 'What have I got to do? Let the teacher come and take care of his class. I am going

to sit in my place, write my exercises and study my lessons.
Secondly, the monitor says, ‘Who is with whom? Boys! Let us have a free for all (fight).’
Thirdly, the monitor takes a cane and stands near the blackboard and threatens, ‘Silence!’ But, the moment the class seems to come under control, one of the backbenchers takes aim at the monitor and hits him with a missile, leaving the entire class in raptures. Tired and angry, the monitor fails to instill discipline in the class despite all his efforts and the students keep mocking and poking fun at him.
Fourthly, the monitor gains instant control over the class. He organizes the class nicely and the moment the teacher walks in the class, the monitor hands over the class to him with complete preparedness.
Thus, the four conditions vis-à-vis the duty of the monitor can be summed up as follows:

1. Irresponsible behavior of the monitor
2. Collusion of the monitor with the mischief-mongers
3. Utter failure of the monitor in achieving his aim, notwithstanding his efforts and struggles, and
4. Success of the monitor in instilling control and discipline in the class

In all the aforementioned conditions, there is one sincere student who, regardless of the state prevalent in the classroom, suggest to his partner that ‘come on, let’s not disturb the class and sit together to complete our assignments. If possible, let us also make the neighboring students aware that they don’t make noise in the class and if they agree, then the few of us will not spoil or worsen the situation of the class.’ Perhaps, the thought of this sincere student makes way in the minds and hearts of other students as well, although he is not an appointed monitor. Consequently, everybody in the class starts emulating these desirable steps. It is also possible that the moment the sincere student gives this noble suggestion to his partner, the latter rejects it and

colludes with the rioters, leaving the admonisher to fend for himself alone.
In the first instance, the teacher of the class, observing the state of his students from a distance, remarks to the principal, ‘Sir! This monitor is highly inefficient and indifferent. Please mark his name so that when I go to the class, I may reprimand him for his behavior. But at that very moment, when the teacher looks at the sincere student sitting at the end of the class, says to the principal, ‘Look! That boy at the far end of the class is sitting quietly and busy completing his assignments. Do you permit me to go to the class now?’ The principal replies, ‘Wait! Have patience!’
In the second instance, the teacher cries in despair, ‘Principal! How careless and sloppy could this monitor be! He has taken the initiative in spreading mischief and trouble in the class!’ But when his eyes fall on the sincere student and his partner, he says, ‘Look at those two at the far end of the class, they are busy doing their work and are totally inattentive to the waywardness of the troublemakers. Moreover, they are also trying to guide the other two students to work with them, which takes the tally to four.
In the third instance, the teacher remarks to the principal, ‘This young monitor is tired and exhausted but the students are not weary of their naughtiness. But at the far end of the class, there are four students who are performing their tasks diligently.’
In the fourth instance, the teacher comments, ‘Let’s go, principal. The class is ready, the monitor is successful and the state of affairs desirable. The class is working in a most smooth and efficient manner. This instance is the most ideal state for both the teacher as well as the principal.
In all the four instances mentioned above, the door of the class opens suddenly and the teacher makes his entry.
In the first instance, immediately on entering the class, the teacher gives a hard slap to the monitor on his back, while the troublemakers too get a kick in the rear. He also congratulates the sincere student for his efforts.

In the second instance, he enters and straightaway kicks the monitor on the back and throws him out of the class. He follows it up with words of encouragement and appreciation for the sincere and diligent student.
In the third instance, he cheers and is grateful to the monitor for his efforts and struggles despite his failure in instilling discipline in the class. Later, he appreciates the hard-working and industrious students of the class, who were busy with the tasks on hand.
In the fourth and final instance, on his entry, when the students stand up in reverence, he says a general thank-you to them all and immediately, gets on with the task of teaching in the class. In the first three instances, a lot of time had been squandered on instilling discipline and numerous efforts were wasted in establishing control in the class. But in the fourth instance, as things were as desired, the teacher could get on with the vital task of teaching straightway on his entry in the classroom, without undue delay. Of course, it should be borne in mind that the duty of the teacher is not to keep the class silent and maintain discipline in it. These are just preliminaries for his main task i.e. teaching and training.
Now, the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) appointed from the side of Allah the Almighty as the dean of the university of humanity, said, 'O people! You have a teacher in occultation, who will come later.' The Muslims became observers and monitors of all other people, while the Shiites happened to be the monitors of the Islamic world. Finally, the Ulama and scholars were appointed as controllers of the Shias around the globe.
In the first case, many went into their houses and sat down, saying, 'What have we got to do? Let Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) come and change things for the better. Observers of this category are aplenty, who suggest, 'Eesa (a.s.) for his religion and Moosa (a.s.) for his religion. We are surrounded by corrupt governments and dishonest rulers, so let us just remain in the confines of our houses.'

In the second case, the monitors and observes themselves participate in spreading mischief and trouble throughout the world.
In the third case, the monitors and observers try their utmost in finding a solution to the problems plaguing humanity but to no avail. They drop down, weary and exhausted. The day the first martyr or the second martyr or Shaikh Fadhlullah (may Allah's mercy be on them all), were lynched by the tyrants of their eras, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), on observing the state of affairs, must have remarked, 'O Allah! They want to eliminate the monitors and controllers from their midst. Permit me to go and transform the state of affairs.' To which, Allah the Almighty must have replied, 'Wait! The time has not yet come!' During the course of history, we had numerous observers and monitors, who left no stone unturned and literally sweated to death, but ultimately collapsed with defeat. The troublemakers and mischief-makers did not allow their class to achieve the desired results.
In the course of all these events, there were some like the sincere and diligent students. They decided that they would not spread mischief in the earth and try to convince at least a few of their friends and acquaintances to tread this path. For, if Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) appears tonight, why should his time be wasted in controlling the class and establishing discipline in it? Why on earth should we be responsible for squandering his valuable time? Let us revise our lessons, become well versed with the commentaries and exegesis of the Holy Quran, and learn jurisprudence and other course material, so that when Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) arrives, his time should not be wasted in revising the syllabus. When the principal says to us that your teacher will come and regulate your undisciplined class, he also reminds us of reviewing and revising the previous lessons. We must not make trouble in the class that when the teacher arrives, he becomes busy in settling the class down because whether we make mischief or not, the teacher will come for sure. For, the principal has assured that even if one minute remains for the

final bell to ring, the teacher will come definitely and perform his task.
The Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) declared,

« لو لم يبق من الدّنيا الّا يوم واحد لطوّل اللّهُ ذلك اليوم حتي يخرج رجل من ولدي فيملأها عدلاً و قسطا كما ملئت جورا و ظلما».

"***Even if one day remains for the world to end, Allah will prolong this day till He raises a man from my nation (ummah). He will fill the earth with justice and equity as it would be replete with injustice and tyranny*.[104]"**

So, as the advent of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is certain and definite, what is our duty? We are the observers for the rest of the world and in the Shiite society our role is akin to that of the diligent and sincere student. It is our religious obligation to organize a small batch of ten students, to have one class and try to prepare at least these few students for the arrival of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Each one of us must strive to the best of our ability, be it our person, locality, organization, school, country, society, etc. to prevent our neighbor from indulging in or spreading mischief in the earth.
If the world becomes organized and disciplined by the Shiite leadership, we will become all ready and prepared for the reappearance of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Establishing global security, safety, comfort and peace are the premises for the final and ultimate aim of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) i.e. to expand upon the teachings and sciences of the divine Prophets (a.s.) and Messengers (a.s.) for humanity. He should not become busy in ensuring peace and tranquility in the world, which is not his main objective. This is our duty. If everybody treads this path, whenever a reformer takes a step in improving the society, he will think: Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is observing us. On his part,

[104] Muntakhabul Asar by Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 247

our Imam (a.s.) will pray: O Allah! He intends to do our work. Please help him and make him successful.
This is our state vis-à-vis Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and the explanation of the tradition under discussion.
O Allah! Send blessings on Muhammad (s.a.w.a) and the progeny of Muhammad!

The Benefits of a hidden Imam

Among the discussions concerning Hazrat Baqiyatullah (a.t.f.s.) is his benefit and advantage during the major occultation. This argument is rooted in the fact concerning his perfections. In other words, once, we discuss about a thing whether it has any benefits or not, while on another occasion, we argue as to what is the advantage that one can draw from him. Thus, the first step that we should take is to separate these two issues. That is, first and foremost, whether the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has ***any*** advantage ***at all*** or not. Secondly, is his existence of any use and benefit ***for us*** or not?

Quite often there are existents that are useful but hold no benefit for us. Sometimes, there are things that, in our view, don't have any advantage or benefit per se. For example, an herb available in the jungles of Africa cures cold, thereby proving its utility. Now, if thousands are unable to utilize this herb to their advantage, we cannot rule out its usefulness and declare that this herb should be destroyed because it's useless. No, it has its benefits but it is for those suffering with cold to gain from it. But if those suffering from cold pursue this herb and after using it, realize that it is absolutely ineffective in curing their cold, only then can they say that this herb did not serve our purpose at all.

This reasoning can be applied for all things like people, houses, books, stones, etc. but usually these two issues are mixed up and people end up being confused.

Concerning the existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), primarily it should be analyzed whether he has any advantage or benefit at all or not. Thereafter, we must evaluate that if we have failed to gain from him, does it imply that he is of no use or was it some lacking on our part to derive benefit from him?

Basically, it should be observed what is the meaning of a man being beneficial and advantageous? Again, prior to this, it must be seen whether the basis of existence of every man is his being useful for others? That is, if something is not useful and advantageous for others, should it be told to cease to exist?

Should this be the criterion for granting existent to creatures or no, it is absolutely incorrect to formulate such a norm? Many are of the view that if a thing has no utility value, it does not have the right to exist and hence they question the rationale of some existents like snake, scorpion, serpent, earthworms, etc.

Before arguing those two points, it should be evaluated: Is the basis for the existence of persons or things their utility value or no, this is not the case? The answer is as follows: This is certainly not the criterion for Allah that if He has to create anything, He has to ensure that it has benefits for others. Allah the Almighty can confer the bounty of existence on any creature merely because He intends to do so, regardless of the fact that it is of no use for others. How can you judge that since the housefly has no utility value, it has no right to exist? Even if it is assumed that it has no advantage for others, nevertheless, it enjoys the gift of existence. On what grounds has the criterion of benefiting others been made for gaining the right to existence?

Secondly, what is the ground for establishing that the existent should be advantageous for humans only? Who has formulated this theory (and from where) that man is the center of existence and that whenever Allah intends to create anything, it must definitely be useful for mankind? Certainly this is not the case. There is a famous incident that one day Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) went towards Mount Tur. On the way, he saw a beetle playing in sheep dung. Instantly, a thought crossed his mind as to why Allah the Almighty has created this beetle. Anyhow, he proceeded to Mount Tur and got so engrossed in supplications that he forgot to ask this question from his Lord. Later, when he wanted to return, Allah inspired to him, 'O Moosa! You want to ask a question?' Hazrat Moosa (a.s.) replied, 'O Lord! I could not get the opportunity to ask.' 'Never mind! You can ask now' rejoined the Almighty and continued, 'O Moosa! Are you aware that the moment you passed by the beetle, what did it think?' Moosa (a.s.) replied in the negative. Allah informed, "The beetle prayed in that very instant, 'O Lord! Why did you create this Moosa? Of what use is he to me?'"

Who says that we humans are the pivots of existence and when we see that something is not beneficial for our existence, we raise objections against Allah concerning the rationale behind its existence?!

It is quite likely that before we complain, the housefly might protest, 'O Allah! Of what use is mankind? For a few minutes of comfort, he sprays pesticide and kills hundreds of our species! Why did You create this transgressor, who spreads mischief in the earth?'

Therefore, this criterion for creation of all species, that is lending benefit and advantage to our existence, more importantly, me, is totally fallacious and should be rejected at the very outset.

You ask: Of what use were the Prophets (a.s.) to us? As if we are the cream of creation that even the honourable Prophets (a.s.) were created for us, while this was not the case and even there is no need for it. Of what use were the Prophets (a.s.) to us? Nothing. Then why did they come? How are you concerned! They are existents and creatures of Allah in their own right and we are another creation. Of what use is our creation to the Prophets (a.s.)?

The idea that Allah the Almighty has created the Prophets (a.s.) for us, is highly erroneous. He neither created the Prophets (a.s.) nor Imam Husain (a.s.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.) for us. They did not sacrifice what all they had for us. Imam Husain (a.s.) didn't lay his life for us. The holy Imams (a.s.) did not get martyred for our cause. They did all these for themselves, to serve their purpose. They sought the obedience of Allah, their Lord and they chose the path of our help to achieve this aim. So, we are not the aim of the creation of the Prophets (a.s.) or Imams (a.s.). The Imams (a.s.) are for themselves and for their Lord. Ultimately, for them, one mode for divine proximity and elevation in degrees was to rescue us (from ignorance) and guide us.

Thus, this is one basic point that we are not the cause of the existence of the Prophets (a.s.) and Imams (a.s.). Now, of what use is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) unto us? Let us assume that he (a.t.f.s.) is of no benefit for us. Does it mean that he (a.t.f.s.) should not exist? Who says that we are the center of creation and if he (a.t.f.s.) is not advantageous for us, he (a.t.f.s.) must cease to exist. The first question and the foremost point that was raised: Of what use is Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) unto us? The reply is that you have crossed your limits, as this question does not concern you at all. He is an existent like us. What is our benefit to him (a.t.f.s.)? Nothing. Therefore, even if we assume that he (a.t.f.s.) is of no use unto us, should not be

much of a problem. This is a very critical point of which most of us are unaware. We think that the Prophets (a.s.), Imams (a.s.) and other illustrious personalities of religion were created for us!

This was the first point. After we are through with this, now let us ask the question: What is his benefit and advantage? Does he (a.t.f.s.) have any utility value or not?

In response, we submit that the benefit and advantage of a thing is relative. What is the use of this glass? Let us sit and talk about its benefits. We will realize that the advantage derived from a thing depends upon how it is being used and as to how benefit is sought from it. Man, in relation with the entire existence, is of some benefit and of much more use and advantageous for those who seek benefit from him.

Divine proofs, Prophets (a.s.) and Imams (a.s.) have some existential benefits, which we have already discussed under the subject of the noblest creation (*imkaan-e-ashraf*). They truly are the pivots of all existence. In the chapter of the perfections of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), we mentioned that creatures are sustained due to his blessings and due to his existence the heavens and the earth survive.

Therefore, the greatest advantage of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is that he (a.t.f.s.) is the pivot of creation, the personification of the perfect human being. But these discussions were concerning the benefits of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) with the entire existence. So, if we keep the above discussions in consideration, no further queries will arise. The greatest benefit of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is that if he did not exist, we would neither. He enjoys the right of existence over us. He (a.t.f.s.) truly is the center of existence. The fruits that we eat, the water that we drink, the sweet that we enjoy, the stability of the earth, etc. are all due to him (a.t.f.s.). Finally, the greatest advantage of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is the spiritual right of him being the pivot of creation.

Suppose, we say that two kilometers from here, there is a superstore or warehouse, wherein everything is available. They ask: They sell meat? I say: Yes. They ask: They sell fruits? Again I reply in the affirmative. They ask: They sell garments? Yet I again say: Yes. They ask: Do they sell books? I say: Yes. So, whatever they require and ask for, my reply is in the positive. But they don't budge from here to reach there. Now, if they sit here till the Day of Judgment, they will never be able to procure the meat, fruits, garments, books, etc. that are available

in the superstore. Indeed, the superstore is useful but we are not attempting to gain advantage from it. You may lit two thousand lamps over here but if you take your book to read in a dark room, you may never be able to gain anything from it and the lamps will be inconsequential for you. The lamps have light but you don't want to gain from it.

The Perfect Man is the treasure-chest of all bounties and the Pure Imams (a.s.) are the source of all endowments. In *Ziyarat-e-Jaameah*, we address them in the following words:

« السلام عليكم يا اهل بيت النُّبوُّه و موضع الرساله و مختلف الملائمه و مهبط الوحي و معدن الرُّحمه و خزّان العلم ».

"*Peace and salutations be on you, O (you, who are) the household of Prophethood, the situate of messengership, the place of ascent and descent of angels, the station of descent of revelation, the treasure-trove of mercy and the treasurers of knowledge.*"

Thus, if you put two thousand Prophets (a.s.) together and roam in the streets and don't derive benefit from them, is it their fault? You get the best of scholars and imprison them. Is it their mistake or that of the people? You may have the best of books in the libraries but if there are no readers, does it mean that the books are useless or that the people are not striving to gain from it?

To sum it up, whatever benefits we want, physical or spiritual, is available with Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). In other words, if you want the know-how for development and progress in the field of agriculture, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) knows it. If you want money and wealth, he (a.t.f.s.) has it. If you want health, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) can provide you with health and safety. If you want your sins to be forgiven, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has the power to get them erased. The keys of Allah's treasures are in his noble hands. The keys of treasures of creation are in his hands. If you really want, go to him and obtain it! So, from the view of being beneficial, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has everything, knowledge, science, perfections of both kinds, spiritual as well as material. These perfections are found not only in Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) but also in his holy ancestors, the infallible Imams (a.s.), who have departed from this world.

Hence, we can gain immense benefits from the holy existence of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) but there are obstacles and hindrances, which are our own creation and which we have already discussed in the chapter of the philosophy of occultation. Indeed, there is no doubt that all the benefits of his existence are not accessible to us and we are deprived of most of these. But this deficiency is neither on account of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) nor due to his Lord. Being deprived of the benefits of an existence that brims with bounties is not the proof of his being of no utility value. If we cannot derive benefits from the knowledge of a scholar, it does not imply by any means that he does not have knowledge. In fact, the opposite holds true. He has plenty of knowledge and information, but we are the unfortunates, dispossessed of his fountain of knowledge.

The advantages and benefits of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) are aplenty. He is the source of bounties. A series of direct endowments reach to all the existents. In traditions, it has come that the infallible Imams (a.s.) were asked, 'How will one derive benefit from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during his occultation?' They (a.s.) replied, '*Just as the sun extends its benefits to one and all despite being behind the clouds.*[105]'

The advantages of Imam-e-Zaman's (a.t.f.s.) existence reaching to the people are very orderly and systematic: spiritual benefits to all the existents, special spiritual benefits for Islam and very, very special benefits for the Shias. Among all these gains, one imperceptible benefit is the protection of religion and Quran during occultation. This is one special support of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) for the Shias. During this entire period of occultation, major as well as minor, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has helped and rescued the Shias from disastrous situations, in particular, the religious scholars. Some of the Shias he (a.t.f.s.) has helped directly and others, indirectly.

There were a series of problems in the protection and preservation of religion, in which, time and again, Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has shown the benefit of his hallowed presence. Among these is the dream seen by Mirza Naaeni (a.r.), the renowned scholar, in the midst of the world war in Iran. The story goes as follows: Mirza Naaeni (a.r.) was highly disturbed thinking about the fate of Iran and its people on account of the

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[105] Muntakhabul Asar by Lutfullah Safi Gulpaygani, p. 270-272

world war. One night, he saw Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in a dream, standing at a distance and indicating to a point. Mirza (a.r.) goes ahead and expresses his discomfort at the prevailing situation. Imam (a.t.f.s.) addresses Mirza (a.r.) as follows, 'Look at that wall'. Mirza (a.r.) says that I saw there was a high wall, which had become crooked in a particular area and was on the verge of collapse. Then Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) said, 'this wall is Iran, which has become crooked but we will not allow it to cave in because there are Shias in it.'

This dream was seen by Mirza Naaeni (a.r.) about 70-80 years ago and is in concordance with situation prevalent then. Suddenly, things changed. Today, things are so bad that we feel that had it not been for some protection, it would not have been possible for us even to survive. But who is the cause of survival? In the course of history, we have witnessed numerous such benefits from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) but have not seen the master himself.

Since the discussion of benefits requires a detailed analysis of history, therefore, keeping brevity in consideration, we would like to submit that innumerable benefits from Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to individuals, societies of Shias and Muslims, visible as well as indiscernible benefits to all the existents have been witnessed. Notwithstanding all these gains and advantages, it is worth mentioning that those that have been seen and witnessed cannot be compared at all with those that are not yet witnessed. That is, the amount of benefits gained from him (a.t.f.s.) is just a miniscule particle compared to what has yet remained untapped. The endowments and bounties, which he (a.t.f.s.) has not yet conferred, are a hidden ocean. Truly, the knowledge and sciences of Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) are yet to be seen, his concealed, leadership qualities are still to be manifested, and his ultimate, majestic authority in the society remains to be observed. Withdrawal of these aspects of his personality is not due to his shortcoming. It is our fault, the fault of the societies that inhabit the world and the fault of those who created hindrances and obstacles for the people to gain from him (a.t.f.s.). All these were discussed earlier in the chapter of the philosophy of the major occultation.

In other words, did Ameerul Momineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) confer the society with all the benefits that he could? Certainly not! Did the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) grant to the people to

the extent of his ability? Obviously not! Was it a deficiency on the part of these holy and infallible personalities? Definitely not! It was the careless attitude of the people and their heedlessness that led to their deprivation of bounties emanating from these noble persons viz. the Messenger of Islam (s.a.w.a.) and the infallible Imams (a.s.).

The conclusion of the discussion is that Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) is replete with bounties and benefits, individual as well as social, spiritual as well as material, of which, only a fraction of a fraction has reached unto the people.

We have witnessed instances of such benefits in our personal lives and viewed the guidance granted to the Shiite scholars in the course of history. Yet, we haven't had access to most of these benefits and we wait for that day when the world will brim with the endowments and bounties conferred on it by its master.

Of course, instances of those who had the opportunity to visit Imam-e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) during occultation and gain direct benefit from his holy existence have been recorded and compiled in separate books. Similarly, independent volumes have been written on his sayings and quotations, letters and documents that comprise of important Islamic gnosis, jurisprudence, laws, etc. apart from the various supplications and invocations narrated on his authority.

« اللّهمّ انّا نرغب اليك في دولهٍ كريمهٍ تعزّ بها الاسلام و اهلهْ و تذلّ بها النّفاق و اهله و تجعلنا فيها من الدعاه الي طاعتك و القاده الي سبيلك».

"*O Allah! Surely we are inclined to you concerning the noble government. Through it, you will honour Islam and its followers, and degrade hypocrisy and its supporters. And that you make us from among those who call towards your obedience and guide to your path*."

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